·STORIES OF LIFE·LOVE·
and

OCTOBER

15 CENTS

Adventure

LIEUTENANT TONY MALLAGH

BY W. TOWNEND

IT IS hard to get fiction stories about the present war that can hold their own against the tremendous realities coming to us in the news reports. Yet here is one that does. When you have read it you will rank it among the six best stories that have been written anywhere concerning the great European struggle and its maelstrom of human emotions. Perhaps you will call it best of them all.

The above, a complete novelette, is enough for any one issue of any magazine, but inside you will find three others—and plenty of short stories.

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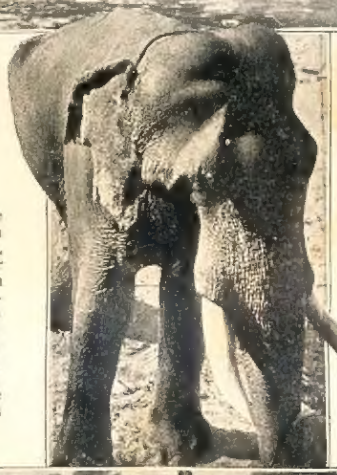
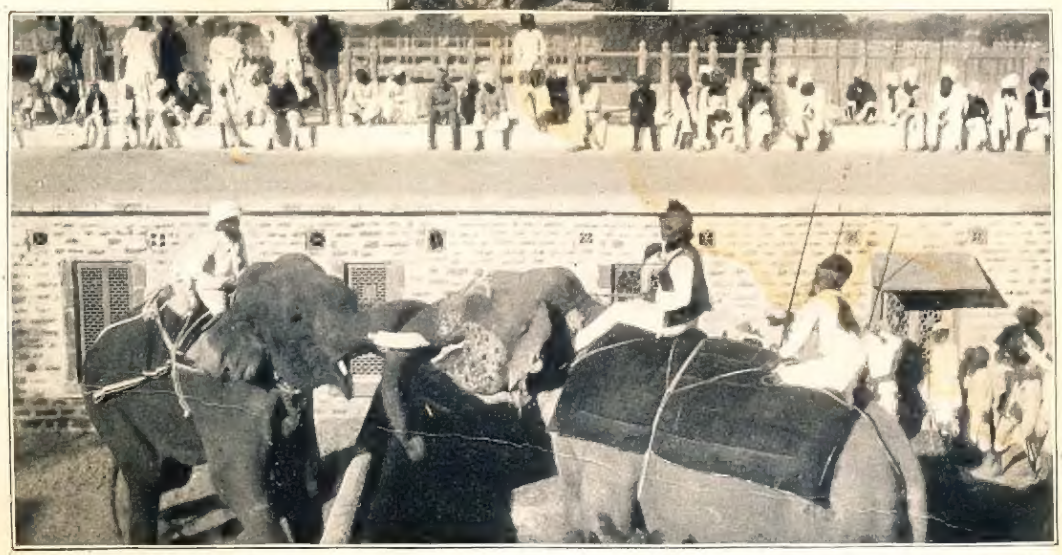
COMPLETE NOVELETTES

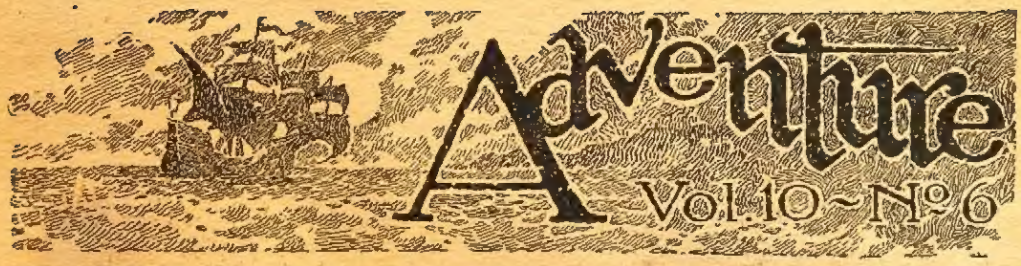
A page of elephants from Gordon McCreagh, from photographs gathered during the adventurous years he spent in Burma, India in general and along the borders of Tibet. Most of you have read in the "Camp-Fire" Mr. McCreagh's amusing account of his experiences in these and other lands. The picture at the top shows an elephant ferry in Ceylon, across one of the swift-flowing streams of the foot-hills. In front is a native haggling about the fare, which ranges from four cents to sixteen or twenty, according to the apparent wealth of the prospective patron. From the attitudes of the hagglers, particularly the ferryman's calm air of entrenched security and his consciousness of the impregnability of a private monopoly, it is to be inferred that the bargain has not yet been struck. What is the subtle, demoralizing influence about a public conveyance that impels its driver to extortion?



This old warrior belonged to a timber-trader. The picture was taken when it was already showing signs of restiveness. Shortly after it went "musth," broke its leg-rope and wandered tremendous distances on the war-path, recognized by the wooden clapper that hung from its neck. It accumulated several deaths to its credit, and was accordingly outlawed as a "rogue." Of course, every native *shikari* who owned a gas-pipe gun license went after it; but it was phenomenally cunning and wandered about for some two years. When it was finally shot by a white man, about thirty soft-lead bullets were found embedded in its hide.



An elephant "fight," such as is got up for the benefit of touring and titled Englishmen. Note the intervening wall and the unwillingness of the elephants. Much shouting and banging of drums by the natives produces only a little trunk-twining and some gentle shoving about.



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COMING!

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Adventure

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Oct. 1915 Vol. 10 No. 6

LIEUTENANT TONY MALLAGH

A Complete Novelette by W Townend

Author of "A-Roving," "Private Harris," "Irish," "Oil at San Nicolas," etc.

CHAPTER I

A SUBALTERN IN THE SOUTH IRISH

WAR must always be the great test of character. No man can go through the ordeal of war and emerge unscathed. And to this truth there are no real exceptions. A man may be made by war, or he may be broken, utterly and without redemption, but whatever happens neither he nor his point of view will afterward be quite the same.

Some men will always be cowards in battle. Terror paralyzes their limbs and robs their minds of all sense of shame. Merely to die like soldiers is beyond their strength. This is the one real argument against conscription, which takes all who are sound of body, rejecting none: valuing quantity rather than quality.

Others there are who know fear yet conquer it. The thought of death in all its manifold forms—by bullet, by shell or by bayonet—is terrible, yet far more terrible is the thought of what men might say were they to fail when wanted. Also, the man who turns his back on the enemy has no greater chance of safety than he who advances bravely. Why not, then, die as a man should die, with honor? It is this feeling that makes war possible at all. Many things may be forgiven, but the one unforgivable sin is fear.

But even in these days when science has forged instruments of destruction so wicked that the slaughter of bygone wars is as nothing compared with the carnage of today, there are men who can enter a battle light of heart, seeking danger as the highest earthly prize within their reach. And these are the men who by sheer indifference to death snatch victory from defeat.

Bravery as a virtue is confined to no one nation, country or creed. For that we may offer thanks. But be that as it may, no race under heaven can show such foolhardy and genuine contempt for an enemy—his

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horse, foot or guns—as the Irish: north, south, east or west—Belfast, Dublin, Cork or Limerick. As they were in the past, so are they now, grim and joyous fighters—impatient, reckless, vengeful—in proof of which many a hard-fought field in France and Belgium, the gossip of trench and billet, and the casualty lists, bear witness.

TONY MALLAGH was a subaltern in the South Irish. This statement should explain a good deal; for the South Irish are particular as to their officers, as many a callow youth has learned to his sorrow and dismay.

In looks and general appearance he was not unlike any other rather ordinary young man of six-and-twenty, who has spent most of his life in the open, being lean and wiry with a good-humored, sunburned face, and eyes in which there seemed always to be lurking a glint of laughter. But Tony Mallagh was not an ordinary young man. Far otherwise. He had faults, of course, as have all of us.

But Tony Mallagh's faults endeared him to people no less than his virtues. He was wofully improvident and a spendthrift, having no sense of the value of money. He bought for the mere pleasure of buying, and mainly for the benefit of others. An appeal for his help, in either time or cash, met with a ready response. He never refused a friend any request, which it might be in his power to grant. He was charitable to a degree of foolishness. He lent where there was no prospect of any return. In times of need, taking no thought for the future, he borrowed from a Jew money-lender in London, and when funds were more plentiful, paid back the debt cheerfully. And if to his mind the rate of interest charged for the loan seemed exorbitant and out of all proportion to the benefit received, he let it pass unquestioned. An officer of the South Irish could not, in common justice to himself and his calling, stoop to argument over a matter of borrowed money.

For his poverty, however, Tony Mallagh had no other than himself to thank. At the age of eighteen his mother's brother, a hard-headed ship broker from Glasgow, had offered to take him into his business and to safeguard his interests as if he had been his only son. This offer rejected on the instant, lost Tony a fair chance of being a rich man before he was forty. But there were things in the world that Tony Mallagh valued above mere wealth. As an alternative to amassing a fortune he joined the army, thereby entering on a career that seemed particularly suited to his temperament.

His accomplishments were many and such as earned him the respect of his fellow subalterns. He excelled in sport of every description. He had played Rugby football for his country, he was as good a shot with a rifle as any man in the regiment, there was no horse that he would not ride, or at least try to, and he had boxed as a lightweight in the public-school championships at Aldershot. Moreover, he was absolutely without fear, and had never been known to lose his temper save on one occasion, famous in the annals of the regiment.

This was soon after he had joined the First Battalion, when he had fought and decisively beaten a brawny greengrocer in Commercial Road, Portsmouth, simply because the said greengrocer, being somewhat exhilarated by strong drink, chose to assert his prerogative as a Briton by slugging his weed of a horse over the head with the butt of his whip. Tony had interfered. The fight was the natural outcome. When the greengrocer, a head taller and perhaps fourteen or so pounds heavier, had been counted out by an enthusiastic crowd of bluejackets, and the police had interfered, and there was every prospect of a fair-sized riot being brought about by the loser's friends and supporters, Tony had settled the matter by offering to purchase the horse and wagon on the spot. The offer was promptly accepted.

This was the reason why ten minutes later Tony's commanding officer, motoring toward Cosham with his wife, had been struck almost speechless by the spectacle of his youngest subaltern, bareheaded and looking slightly the worse for wear, seated on the front of a dilapidated greengrocer's wagon with a policeman by his side, driving a dejected white horse.

"Mr. Mallagh," said the Colonel in mild astonishment, "Mr. Mallagh, may I ask——"

"It's all right, sir," said Tony blandly, "we're just taking this old horse to be destroyed."

"But, really, Mr. Mallagh, do you think that a greengrocer's wagon is er—quite a suitable vehicle? Wouldn't it be as well to er—allow the constable to take charge of

the horse alone, without your er—valuable assistance?"

Fortunately none of the spectators of the fight knew that Tony was an officer in the South Irish; fortunately also the Colonel happened to be possessed of feelings somewhat akin to Tony's own. So the matter was dropped. But, so he was told, Tony was never to do anything of the kind again. Officers of His Majesty's Army must not fight in the streets as though they were ordinary mortals. It is not fitting. But the story having leaked out followed Tony out to India and home again when he was transferred to the Second Battalion, and was related as typical of himself and his methods.

Tony, indeed, was unpractical, a visionary, rather given to acting without thought and apt to be led away by a far-fetched sense of humor. His smile won him friends where others found only coldness and hostility. He made no enemies, and his men adored him. Also, though more or less poor, he was always happy.

For the rest, he was Irish, hailing from County Kerry, and in love with the sweetest and dearest girl in the world, as poor and as proud as himself, who lived with an aunt, the widow of a retired admiral, in a small house at Farnborough, within easy reach of the North Camp where Tony was stationed in the Spring of the year, 1914.

Marriage is not a risk to be entered on lightly. For six months Tony Mallagh, rendered strangely cautious by his good fortune, waited until such time as his finances showed signs of improvement. But at the end of the six months, an interminable age, his patience was worn threadbare. The novelty and charm of being engaged, even though it were to the sweetest and dearest of girls, was slightly dimmed.

As a general rule, Tony, though having a host of friends, was disinclined to consult any regarding his own affairs. Nevertheless he felt now that he needed advice. There was only one man in the whole regiment to whom he could go: Shannon, his company commander, and his senior by about ten years.

Tony's attitude of mind toward Shannon was peculiar. He admired him for what he was and for what he had done as a soldier. He had medals for the Tirah expedition in '97, the Soudan in '98, the Boer War, Somaliland, for the northwest frontier six years before, in addition the D. S. O., earned in Natal on the way to Ladysmith. He was a disciplinarian. B Company was the smartest in the battalion. He was sincere, kindly, clever. Yet from Tony Mallagh's view-point he had his failings. He was deliberate, slow in understanding, over methodical, particular as to detail, fussy and, as all confirmed bachelors must at last be, old-maidish in his tastes. But his judgments were to be relied on. He would say what he thought, making no effort to hide his opinion, favorable or not.

So to Shannon, Tony went one morning after parade and stated his case. That Shannon was a man who knew nothing of women, who was commonly reported to despise the sex, was no drawback. His advice would be free from prejudice, one way or the other. Also he knew Sybil's aunt, and Sybil as well.

Shannon, a big man with black hair and a small, close-clipped black mustache, sat in an armchair, smoking a pipe, his eyes half-closed, his square-jawed face giving no clue to what thoughts he might have. Yet Tony was strangely comforted even by the knowledge that he listened.

"So you see how things are, sir! What ought I to do? It's rotten luck on the girl, you know, to be engaged to a fat-headed chump like I am. Lord! We may drift on in this kind of way for about fifteen years, or more, till I'm a Major, if I ever get that far. I'll never have any more money than I have now, apart from my pay, I'm certain. And what's that to a girl as ripping, and as good as Sybil? Nothing—nothing at all. I know, from—well, just from knowing her, that she'd marry me on what I have now. But would it be fair? Would it be playing the game?"

Shannon frowned and looked if anything rather bored.

"She's promised to marry you, has she—some time or other, eh?"

"Rather!" said Tony.

"Said anything to any one?"

"No, sir. You see—well, we've kept it a secret for many reasons."

"Ah! And no one knows?"

"Not a blessed soul!" Tony waited, wondering at the drift of the questions that were asked. "Of course, sir, I might try and exchange into something that's better paid than the line: the A. S. C., or the Army Ordnance, for instance. Or I could get out to Egypt, perhaps, or West Africa, or——"

Shannon leaned forward suddenly.

"What's that? What's that you say? Leave the South Irish! Tony, you're a fool! You can do one thing, so far as I can see, and only one. I know your fiancée—er—well enough to er—realize that if she loves—" the word seemed to worry him—"if she er—cares for you, Tony, and you say she does, money will play only a small part in the er—affair. Poor! Of course you are, and always will be. Even if you had a million, you'd be hard up." He grunted. "Huh! Leave the battalion, indeed! Not if I know it."

"Then you think I ought to marry soon."

"At once, if you can." He hoisted himself out of his chair and stretched out his arms and yawned. "And now, get out! I'm sick and tired of hearing you talk."

Tony grinned and stood up.

"It's jolly good of you, sir, to have bothered. It is, really."

"Get out!" repeated Shannon gruffly. "Don't worry me!"

By his manner he seemed to regard the interview as of no importance, or as merely a waste of time that might be otherwise more usefully employed. But when Tony had closed the door after him, he dropped into his chair once more and stared blindly across the little room, a dull pain in his heart and his teeth pressing deeply into his lower lip.

It seemed impossible. Had his pride been so great that he had been unable to see what was passing before his very eyes? Had others seen and he been ignorant of open warnings? The girl he had thought to marry, the one girl in the whole world a man might worship unashamed, had been taken from him by Tony Mallagh. Tony, the irresponsible, extravagant, happy-go-lucky, reckless, hard-up Tony, had beaten him.

And Sybil! In the depths of his despair there yet remained a feeling of thankfulness that he had been spared the shame of hearing from her own lips what he now knew.

He rose from his chair and stood gazing out of the window on to the barrack square. A sense of his own worthlessness gripped him. What right had he to hope that a girl like Sybil would have chosen a man like himself: a man with no knowledge beyond the Army; a man who could sit tongue-tied and half-frightened in her presence? The thought of his own conceit—which he would have hated in another—sickened him.

But it was all over now and done with. Sybil would marry Tony Mallagh, and they would be very happy together and very poor, and he himself, Captain R. B. Shannon, D. S. O., Second Battalion, Royal South Irish Fusiliers, would work hard and hope for war and try and put out of his mind the picture of the girl whom he had thought his for the mere asking.

CHAPTER II

LOVE, AND A RUMOR OF WAR

NOT even Tony Mallagh, reckless and improvident as he was, would have risked marriage, had not matters taken an unexpected turn. It was while he was in Ireland, on leave, that he read of the death of Sybil's aunt. He left for Aldershot the same evening.

The girl, dressed in deep black, was in the garden at the back of the house when he arrived.

"Sybil," he said presently, after the first greetings were over, "what do you intend to do?"

She gave a little shrug.

"I don't know, Tony. I've got to earn a living somehow, of course."

"Oh!" said Tony sagely. "Indeed. Just so. Earn a living." He looked at her with loving admiration.

"You see, dear," said the girl, "Aunt Jane's income was for life only. And—well, that's all gone. So I must do something, mustn't I?" He said nothing and she continued, "I'm fairly clever at housekeeping, I can look after servants, keep accounts, garden, and so on, so I thought I might be useful as a companion to some one, or a governess, or——"

Tony interrupted with a grunt signifying extreme disapproval and disgust.

"Quite so. A governess, eh! Ye-es. I can just see you governessing, sweetheart. Quite so. You've no people at all, dear have you?"

"Only a sister in Dublin. Her husband's in the engineers. I could go to her for a while, but—well, she's not very well off, and it's better for me to do something for myself, isn't it?"

"No," said Tony decidedly. "It isn't—nothing of the kind. Ridiculous! Wouldn't

hear of it. Sybil, my love, let us consider the facts. Why put off any longer what might be done now?"

She watched him in silence, the sunshine making her hair like spun gold, her blue eyes, blue as the sky above, very grave and tender and loving, her cheeks flushed, a little nervous smile on her lips.

"Sweetheart," said Tony, "we've nothing to lose by marriage. Nothing. All to gain. I'm sick of this everlasting waiting. At this rate we won't be married for fifty years, not if we're supposed to be waiting till I can give you what you deserve. Consider the facts, old girl, and decide. What's more, if the money I have now can keep *me*, throwing it about like I do and not trying to save, it'll keep the pair of us. That's logic. We'd be poor, of course, but—will you risk it? Could you marry a poor man, Sybil dear, and be happy?"

"It's not myself I'm worried about," she said slowly, "it's you. I've always been poor, but it will be hard on you, Tony, to have to give up——"

"Rubbish and fiddlesticks!" said Tony. He took her into his arms and kissed her. "If that's all, sweetheart, we'll be married just as soon as we jolly well can. I'll tackle the Colonel first thing in the morning. You leave it to me. He won't mind when I tell him everything, I know. He's eating out of my hand these days. Tame as a white rabbit with some green-stuff."

And, allowing for exaggeration, Tony was quite correct. Married subalterns were not approved of in the South Irish for many reasons, but for once the Colonel raised no objections.

"In your case," he said, "I think it's almost the best thing that could have happened. You've made a most excellent choice—most excellent. And, Tony, if I were you I'd leave all my financial affairs to my wife. From what I know there's more sense in that young lady's little finger than there is in your whole body. Now run along and get married as soon as you please."

And married they were within the month.

Quite the most valuable of their many presents came from Shannon, who, much to his regret, was called up to London on business on the very morning of the wedding. This was in the middle of June.

For a little over five weeks Tony lived in a kind of dream in which fact and fancy seemed strangely mingled. Never before had he known such happiness. Never indeed had he thought such happiness possible. Sybil was wonderful. Each day that passed revealed in her unexpected charms.

Deep down in his heart Tony pitied those less fortunate than himself: not only bachelors, but men with wives less lovely, or less perfect than his wife. For, after all, as he well knew, there was only one Sybil. How he had existed without her puzzled him.

But if marriage brought to him happiness, so also it brought fear. Supposing he were to die, what would become of Sybil? The thought of the future, with all its possibilities of disaster, daunted him. He must make provision, certainly. But how? This was the problem that, try as he might, he could not solve.

Shannon met him one day walking slowly across the parade-ground toward the mess.

"Tony," he said, "what's wrong?"

Tony came to himself with a start. "What's that? Hullo, sir, never saw you. Wrong! Nothing." And as if to prove his words he smiled with the utmost good nature.

Shannon shook his head.

"Known you too long, now, old son, not to know when you're worrying. How's the wife? Quite fit, eh?"

"Rather!" said Tony.

"Well, something's troubling you, I know. Tell it a mile off."

"Thinking," Tony laughed. "That's all."

"Shouldn't do it too often, then. Bad for you." He hesitated. "Finances all right?"

"Yes—so far as it goes. Sometimes one doesn't see clearly. You know, the future and all that kind of thing. But I'm not worrying." A sudden thought flashed through Tony's mind. "You don't notice that I've changed at all, do you, since I married. Because I haven't. Not in the very least." He wanted that much to be understood plainly.

"Changed!" said Shannon. "No. Why the dickens should you be changed?"

"I'm glad of that," said Tony. Then for no particular reason he added: "I think if anything happened to Sybil. I should—well, I don't know what I should do."

Shannon stared at him without comment and passed on.

THERE came an evening soon after when a certain rumor, that owed its origin to a shot fired in the streets of a town in far-off Bosnia, reached the mess of the Royal South Irish Fusiliers.

All through dinner the tide of talk had ebbed and flowed in well-worn channels. No trace of care or worry for the future showed on the faces of those gathered around the long table under the shaded lights. Life offered to man nothing of more importance than sport in all its branches, hunting, fishing, racing, shooting, golf, or the theater, perhaps, or London, or leave in the Autumn when the year's training should be finished. As if by instinct, all mention of any topic dealing with the army was avoided.

But when the last of the mess waiters, stolid privates of the regiment, had left the room, there was a sudden silence.

The Colonel, broad and thick-set and gray as a badger, a string of medals adorning his scarlet mess-jacket, a bone-white scar on his forehead, bearing witness to the skill of a Boer marksman at Inniskilling Hill, leaned back in his chair and glanced from side to side through half closed eyelids.

"Well," he said after a while, "it looks like the real thing at last. Or doesn't it?"

Carne, the senior Major, nodded. "Don't see how they can keep out. Not Germany; not Russia. And where's it to end, eh?"

"*We're* not ready for war, of course," said one of the other majors. "We never are. Yet, maybe, the first thing we know, we'll be fighting!"

Tony Mallagh, who was dining in mess, growled:

"And just because a maniac at the other side of Europe puts a bullet into some one we've never heard of! All the same, it'ull be a good job for Ireland if it does come. Any war's better than civil war." Shannon looked at him curiously. "But," and he went on with a little laugh, "we won't fight, of course. This Government of ours isn't going to let itself be dragged into a war just on account of a little nation like Serbia being wiped out, is it? We'll stay out and sell goods, ammunition and guns and undervests and boot-laces and tracts and whisky to both sides."

"And you, Shannon," said the Colonel, "what do you say, eh?"

"I don't think, sir, I know. It's a war, that's certain. The biggest thing that ever happened."

In the anteroom afterward the Mess resolved itself into a committee of public safety for the defense of the realm, and sought knowledge from books of reference, the army list and many maps.

To Tony Mallagh, seated as far as possible from the chattering groups, a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica in his lap, came Shannon, hands in pockets, a grim smile on his lips.

He dropped into a chair beside him.

"I'm looking up the habits and customs of the Serbs," said Tony. "Curiosity, that's all."

"Shouldn't worry about Serbia," said Shannon. "Try under B."

"Why B?"

"Belgium."

"Oh!" said Tony. "Do you mean—you don't think, sir, that—" He closed the book. "You don't mean to tell me the Germans will invade Belgium to get at France?"

"Why not?" said Shannon.

"Then," said Tony miserably, "I don't see how even this fool of a Government can keep from fighting. Good Lord!"

Shannon was troubled in his mind. How would he himself, supposing he were in Tony's shoes—a married man, married less than two months—bear the news that might send him across the Channel to the biggest war the world had ever seen?

"It's war, at last, then," said Tony in a low voice.

"Afraid so," said Shannon. "It's hard on you, though—awful hard."

Tony straightened himself with a jerk and thrust two fingers between his collar and neck as if choking.

"Yes, it's hard," he said. "As a matter of fact, sir, I'd been thinking a good deal lately of the things that might happen: sickness, illness, accidents, and so on. Marriage makes a man think, somehow. But about the only thing I didn't think of was war. I want to see some fighting some time or other, of course. Who doesn't? But—" he uttered a hard laugh—"rather rough luck, isn't it, coming at this particular time?"

A voice hailed them.

"Here, Shannon, you're an expert. See if you can figure this out. And what's the

matter with Tony Mallagh? He looks as if he'd committed a particularly beastly murder, or lost his platoon, like he did last Thursday. Tony, dearest, what is it? Ickle pain in 'oo tummy? Tell nursey!"

Tony laughed, and with that the worry passed off, not to return until he was back in his own home with Sybil, descending the stairs.

"Sybil," he said, "I've something to tell you. Something rather important."

"Nothing wrong, is there?" she asked.

Tony nodded, and she led the way into the drawing-room.

"Well, dear, what is it? Don't be afraid!" she said quietly.

She stood by the table, very slim and erect, and looking lovelier than ever.

"Sybil, I've bad news for you, dear, about the regiment. Dearest, there's going to be a war in Europe, and they think we'll have to fight."

"The South Irish!"

"Yes." The thought of what she must suffer rose up to stifle him.

"If they send you, dear, you must go, mustn't you? It's duty, isn't it? And you're worried, you poor boy, because of me!" She kissed him lightly. "Poor old Tony! You mustn't. Why, Tony, you don't mean to say you think me a coward!" Her laugh sounded almost happy. "Tony, you're forgetting I'm the daughter of a soldier, as well as being the wife of one. I'm not frightened, love—not in the least."

"You darling!" said Tony. "I think you're the bravest girl alive—and the most beautiful. I was almost afraid of telling you."

"Oh!" said the girl. "As far as that goes, we were talking it over tonight at dinner, Mrs. Carne and I. Besides, we've been thinking for the last day or so we might have war. If we fight, well and good. It can't be helped, can it? And I wouldn't have you hold back, Tony, or feel that marriage made you any less of a soldier, for all the money in the world."

And after that Tony Mallagh put from him all thoughts of worry or gloom. The future could take care of itself. If the South Irish Fusiliers were sent to the war, if there were a war at all, he could go, lightheartedly, free from anxiety, knowing that Sybil wished him to fight and to fight his hardest, and what could a man want more than that?

CHAPTER III

GOOD-BY

WITHIN the week war was declared and there followed days of worry and endless labor for those in authority: suppressed excitement, feverish activity, much drilling of reservists, musketry, field days, inoculation, inspections, with a vague undercurrent of emotion apparent throughout the whole regiment. Rumors abounded, both in the officers' mess and the men's canteen.

Imperceptibly but surely the bonds of discipline tightened. The Colonel, so it was said, was feeling the reins, and the regiment responded. The number of defaulters grew all of a sudden beautifully less, even the most confirmed of offenders became cautious, drunkenness decreased as by some miracle, nor was it that the non-commissioned officers turned blind eyes on those who fell from the path of virtue. If this were war, war that would bring to the South Irish much honor and glory and more fighting than even an Irish regiment had ever dreamed of, then was it necessary that each man should take the field ready and fit to do credit to himself and his battalion. Also, from the point of view of the rank and file, it behooved the mere private to walk warily lest when the order came, he should be left alone, at home, confined to cells, doomed to inaction and misery, while others more virtuous, fought and perchance died.

The time for good-bys drew near. Shannon, busy with the affairs of his company, had seen little of Tony Mallagh for some days, save in the presence of others, or on duty.

Then, one afternoon, Tony overtook him and said that Sybil was leaving for London the next morning and would he come up to the house, if he could spare half-an-hour or so, to say good-by.

"Yes," said Shannon. "Yes, certainly. Very glad."

"She said she'd like to see you," continued Tony, "and I've been so rushed lately I never thought anything more about it until today. You see, we decided it would be better for her not to be here when the regiment leaves. She didn't want it. No more did I. Too depressing. And she's going to stay with Mrs. Carne in London."

So that evening Shannon sat in the small, bare drawing-room, by the tall window that

opened on to the lawn, while the girl, wrapped in a big white cloak—for the night air was cool—talked lightly as one without care.

It was not until Tony, whistling cheerfully, growling about his kit, went off and left them together, that she told why it was she had sent for him.

"It's very good of you to come, Captain Shannon," she said quietly. "I wanted to ask you a favor."

"Anything I can do, Mrs. Mallagh, I will."

"I'm leaving tomorrow," she said, "and this is the last time I'll see you——"

"Till er—we come back," put in Shannon. "Till we er—come back, eh?"

"When will that be? There's always the 'when,' Captain Shannon, isn't there?" For a while she was silent.

From the road there came the sound of some one whistling. In the distance a train rumbled through the night, bound perhaps to tide-water with troops. The breeze whispered in the leaves of the trees, bearing with it the scent of roses. The clear notes of a bugle sounded faintly from the direction of the North Camp.

"Captain Shannon," said the girl suddenly, "the regiment, you and the rest, are going to fight. That's as it should be. No woman worth her salt would wish for anything else."

"It's hard on the married men," said Shannon gruffly. —— hard! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Mallagh—inexcusable."

"It's not easy for us women," she continued in a low voice. "But that doesn't alter facts, does it? And if we *are* to fight, why—we must fight our best. It's the waiting that tries one, I know, waiting until there's a telegram, or a letter, or even a line in the paper and we learn that what we feared has happened, and—and life isn't worth living any more." For an instant a shade of worry showed in the blue eyes. "I remember when I was only a small girl, my eldest brother, twenty-one he was, was killed at Spion Kop—you were there with the regiment, weren't you? And we saw his name in the paper before the wire arrived from the War Office. Breakfast-time it was, and mother——"

She stopped and her fingers plucked idly at the white fur on her cloak.

"But it doesn't do any good to think of what might happen. That's why I'm always so cheerful; Tony, too. Thinking makes you imagine things, and then they happen."

"You mustn't talk like that, Mrs. Mallagh," said Shannon, "it's not right. Why—good Lord! Don't you understand that—that——"

He, in his turn, broke off, helpless to say what should be said.

She shook her head.

"Don't think, for one moment, that I'd keep him at home, even if I had the power, or that—that I think he's going to die. I don't. But, Captain Shannon—" she leaned forward in her chair, and her eyes sought his as if seeking some ray of hope or comfort—"listen! I know he'll come back to me, I feel it, but I can't help being a little anxious. I can't really, though I try not to."

"Well!" said Shannon doubtfully.

"What I wanted to ask you was: Would you just keep an eye on Tony when he gets out to the front, and pull him up if you think he's deliberately trying to get himself killed!" She gave a little laugh.

Shannon stared at her in dumb bewilderment. Did she think *he* could help? Did she think that it was within *his* power or the power of any mortal to save her husband from harm? Had she no idea what war was or meant? The very calmness of her words and her steady smile was an added mystery.

"Of course I know that he's got to run into danger. I want him to. He's got to prove himself as good as the best. I want to be proud of him. But you know what Tony is. He's foolish in some ways. He's never seen any fighting yet, and he's bound to be reckless over it, just to show that he's brave, so I thought that if you could give him a word of advice it might help him." She raised her eyebrows. "You don't think I'm panicky, do you, Captain Shannon? I'm not. I'm not even worrying. But—he's all I've got in the world, and—well, if *he* went, life wouldn't be worth the trouble of living."

A deep pity swept over Shannon, but he did not speak.

"You're not angry with me, Captain Shannon?" she asked.

"Angry! Of course not."

"I asked you because you've been a friend to him, and—" she hesitated, her cheeks flaming—"and a friend to me, also."

A friend! The word seemed to mock him.

A friend! And somehow the old heartache and longing that he had imagined put aside forever, came back. He himself had suffered, far more than he had thought possible. So, now, he could feel the agony that gripped the girl seated by the open window—the girl he had once hoped to make his wife. If Tony died, she would lose everything life had to offer. She said as much herself.

"I'll do my best," he said quietly.

"Thank you," she said. "I knew you would."

There were footsteps in the hall, and Tony entered.

"Hope you didn't think I was neglecting you, sir. I've been working over the everlasting problem of packing my kit. How on earth do they expect us to manage with only thirty-seven pounds of baggage, eh?"

Shannon dragged his wandering thoughts out of the future to the present.

"You either leave half what you want behind, or else you start off to the war with about a hundredweight of stuff strapped on to you beside what you've got to carry already."

"Lord! I'm no blighted dromedary. And think of the looks of the thing. I want to look like a soldier, not like a traveling tinker. Bad for the illustrated papers, too. Special attraction: double-page photograph from the front, 'Charge of the South Irish' spoiled by honorable self in foreground, carrying a portable bath-tub, and a pair of waders, and a gramaphone, on my back, and encouraging my brave lads to go on without me, waving a fishing-rod in one hand and the parrot's cage in the other. Not a nice thought, is it? And I couldn't really charge, carrying everything I ought to take with me, could I?"

"You'll excuse him, Captain Shannon, I'm sure. He's not often taken like that. We try and keep it quiet. Sad, isn't it?"

Shannon laughed and stood up.

"I must go now, I'm afraid."

Sybil was also standing, smiling as if they had been discussing the most unimportant topics imaginable.

"Good-by, then, and thank you very much, indeed. You'll write sometimes, won't you? You won't forget, will you?"

"Rather not. Only too delighted."

She held out a small hand. "Good-by, then. And we'll meet after the war is over."

"Tell you what," said Tony with sudden enthusiasm, "we'll all have dinner together in London as soon as we get back. At the Savoy or the Carlton. Sybil, you won't forget, will you? Or—or if we're all broke by that time, the cabman's shelter at Hyde Park Corner."

"Right," said Shannon gravely. "Mind, that's settled. And we'll go to the theater afterward."

As he closed the gate of the front garden and turned away he saw Tony and the girl standing in the doorway side by side, silhouetted against the light. He wondered as he waved his hand what bitterness and sorrow good-by might mean for them. Less than two months of marriage and then the parting.

And for once Shannon could feel glad that he at least left no one to mourn his going.

TWO days later, very early in the morning, the Second Battalion of the Royal South Irish Fusiliers swung out of barracks and down the white road that led to the station and the battlefields of Belgium. And the tune to which they marched, played by the drums and fifes was "Garry Owen," a tune to which their forbears had set out nearly a hundred years before on a like errand of mercy.

As they passed through the village, men and women came to the door of the houses, windows were thrown open and heads thrust forth, and, as if sprung into existence from nowhere, a swarm of small boys kept pace with the band. The men, marching at ease, laughed and joked their good-bys.

Shannon, picking up the old familiar landmarks with his eyes, listening to the shrill whimper of the fifes, saw standing by the front of a small shop, apart from the people, a girl wrapped in a long coat.

Something about her seemed vaguely familiar. Tony Mallagh marching with the platoon immediately ahead had halted and was waiting for him to come abreast.

He quickened his pace.

"Tony," he said, "there's Sybil!"

"What!" Tony uttered a little exclamation of despair, then making his way through the crowd reached the girl in the long coat.

"Sybil," he whispered. "You shouldn't have. Why did you?"

She held out her hands and smiled.

"I had to."

Whether people were watching or not made no difference now. He drew her to him and kissed her.

"I just had to," she said. "But I never intended that you should see me, Tony. Never."

"My dear, my dear!"

Her lips quivered, and it seemed as if her strength were failing, yet she still smiled at him.

"You'd better go, Tony. I mustn't keep you."

"It's hard, love—I never knew how hard till now."

"Hush! Don't make it worse, dear. I'll be all right while you're away. Remember that, won't you!"

"The war won't last very long, love, I know. It can't."

And why should it? They were only going to fight Germany. And what was Germany? The greatest military power on earth—nothing more. And were they to be frightened because of that? What were mere numbers? Did he not belong to the Royal South Irish Fusiliers, the finest regiment in the whole world, bar none? Was not that sufficient in itself? So:

"It will be all over by the new year," said Tony. "You see if it isn't."

She flashed a little smile at him through her tears, for she was crying now, and tried to laugh.

"Of course. Sooner, I hope."

"Good-by, sweetheart. Good-by."

She kissed him on the lips, twice, then gave him a little shove.

"Go, dear. Please."

He turned and hurried after the regiment, a tightness in his throat and a mist before his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL OF FIRE

TO THOSE ignorant of war, and they be many, a regiment's history and traditions may seem of small importance. But a regiment that bears on its colors the names of famous victories, and can trace its ancestry back to the days of Wellington or Marlborough or Clive or Wolfe, has a faith in its own prowess that counts for much when there is an enemy to be faced and beaten.

The very thought of failure was to the men of the South Irish, not merely remote, but impossible. Would they, men who had joined the army of their own free will, men who had served in the four quarters of the globe, go down before those who were conscripts, forced to serve? Not though they were outnumbered, ten to one

What German regiment was fit to breathe the same air as the South Irish? The rank and file had faith not only in themselves, but in their officers. If there were fighting to be done, the Royal South Irish Fusiliers would show the way to any battalion of any regiment, Scots, Irish, Welch or English, in the army. The Guards themselves could do no more. Even the recruits, fresh from their training at the depot in the South of Ireland, non-commissioned officers, or newly joined reservists, not yet free of the taint of civil life, who talked of war as men who knew its meaning, could feel that they were fighters no less than those others, old soldiers of twenty years of service.

So Tony Mallagh watching his men, hearing their talk and laughter and songs, could rejoice and feel certain in his heart that wheresoever it might be his duty to lead, there they would follow. For were they not of the same blood as the men of Inkerman, and Delhi, and Barossa and Waterloo? The campaign might go against them—generals and staff officers might blunder, plans might miscarry, the artillery be outranged—but whatever happened, though the machine itself might break down through overwork, the blame could never rest with the men—or not with the men of the South Irish. Not even the thought of Sybil waiting at home for news, entirely took from him the pride he had in his regiment.

Whatever the future might have in store, the present with its steady tramping of many feet, the passing of horse and guns in clouds of thick dust, the little towns in the hot sunlight, the bivouac under the stars, the meeting at cross-roads of other regiments, the bustle and movement and change of scene, was all that mattered.

And then one afternoon there was borne on the breeze a faint far-off rumbling.

"What's that?" said a young private. "Thundher?"

"Thundher?" Telford, the company Sergeant-Major, grimly humorous, chuckled. "That's no thundher. 'Tis a lullaby that ye're hearin'. Did ye niver leshen to guns before?"

"Guns!"

"Sure, an' it's guns. 'Tis fiel' arthillery in acthion an' they're fightin' yonda already."

Shannon who had overheard the conversation laughed.

"Remember the morning we heard the guns at Colenso, Sergeant-Major?"

"Colenso! Shall I iver forgit, sorr? An' what happened afther!"

NEXT morning the South Irish Fusiliers were under fire. By noon they were blooded, two men being killed by shrapnel.

The success or failure of a regiment in battle depends on its officers no less than on the rank and file. This is beyond argument. And although skill in the art of war—a knowledge of tactics, strategy, topography, military history and higher mathematics—are no doubt highly useful, the private soldier, and more especially the Irish private, demands in his officer not only skill, but also courage—the courage that stops short of nothing, not even death.

In Shannon, the men of the South Irish found one after their own hearts—their ideal fighter. In the agony and despair of the long retreat from Mons to the Marne, when day after day they were driven along without mercy, footsore and sleepy and famished, turning at times and fighting fierce rearguard actions to save both themselves and others, Shannon never for a moment lost their confidence. Even when things were at their worst—when the German guns raked the trenches, when men were dying like flies in Autumn, when the mere horror and helplessness of modern war sapped the courage and weakened the resolution of the strongest—Shannon was at his best.

And when the limit had been reached beyond which human endurance can not go—when even the finest soldiers on earth, outnumbered, must break—his voice and presence, scornfully tolerant of their weakness, brought back to the men around him their self-respect. He asked no man to go where he himself would not venture. His life he seemed to regard as of no importance. He was without fear. Even casualties that reduced the regiment to less than two-thirds its strength left him unmoved. This was the attitude he purposely adopted. Nothing could be gained, so he argued rightly, in letting his men see that he too felt the shock and horror of death in its most awful form.

Tony Mallagh watched him with despair. For in spite of the tales that he had heard of past campaigns, Tony had never in his heart believed it possible that any man could bear himself in action as did Shannon. Yet what Shannon could do, he, Tony Mallagh, must do also. No matter how fierce the fire, an officer of the Royal South Irish Fusiliers, the finest regiment in the army, must show himself proof against the slightest sign of fear. He must remember always that his men trusted in him to lead them, and that whatever happened, no matter what others in other regiments might say or do, no sign of panic or hesitation in the face of danger should escape him. This was the law of the regiment that must not be broken.

There are some secrets a man will try and hide even from himself. When first he had heard the distant thudding of the field-guns Tony had felt a thrill of fierce excitement. Yet as the time drew near when he should find himself in action a dull lassitude crept over him. His limbs seemed to lose their power. His throat was dry and parched. This, he knew, was nothing. Merely overexcitement. Nervousness. He had had the feeling before, often, before entering the ring to box. It was nothing.

And yet when the regiment came at length into the zone of fire, when the shells began to burst on every side, and the bullets whispered overhead, and men dropped, then did Tony Mallagh, Lieutenant in the Royal South Irish Fusiliers, find himself in the grip of a fear more terrible than anything he could have dreamed. Nor did the fear pass, as he had fondly hoped. Rather did it grow and grow, fed on the sights and sounds of battle.

But though his whole being craved for safety, though had he obeyed his instincts he would have turned and fled, he forced himself to a semblance of indifference to danger. He laughed and jested with his men, he talked easily, he steadied his voice and controlled his movements through sheer force of will. He was afraid of being killed, afraid of being wounded, and yet still more afraid of being called a coward. This was the greater fear. Had he been less a coward, so he reasoned bitterly, he would have shamed himself forever.

War was terrible. War was the waiting hour upon hour while the enemy's guns searched for the hidden trench. War was

the listening to the sobs of the dying and of the wounded who could not die. War was the witnessing of sights more terrible than hell itself could offer. War was the remembering in dead of night those left at home to wait and mourn. Yet, only a few short weeks before—and this was to Tony the most bitter thought of all—war had seemed no more than the long awaited chance to prove his manhood. The first day's fighting in the trenches had told him everything he wished to know. He, Tony Mallagh, who had looked on courage as man's highest virtue, was a coward.

EARLY one morning, before it was light, a large force of the enemy attacked a post held by B Company of the South Irish, a shallow trench thrown up the night before on the edge of a small wood.

When the sky was no more than a pale gray in the east, scattered shots were heard from in front. Soon after, the men of the outlying picket arrived at a double, dragging with them one who was wounded. The Germans were close at hand.

Tony, who had been talking with Shannon, caught his breath. So the Germans were coming, were they? How many? The corporal in charge of the picket did not know. "Swarrms of thim!" he said. Tony found himself shaking as if cold.

But cold or not—and he had not felt that he was cold—he must stand his ground or else people might say he was frightened! And that would never do.

Shannon was speaking.

"They'll be coming along in a minute or so, now, and we've got to give 'em a bit of a dusting."

Shannon's voice was filled with a curious exultation. Tony turned to him, heavy and listless. He was going to fight. He was going to be shot at. And perhaps he was going to die.

Nevertheless, true to his training, he forced a laugh.

"Rather!" he said. "We're in for a jolly scrap, I hope. Like their infernal impudence trying to rush us, isn't it?"

He moved off to that portion of the trench held by his platoon.

His platoon sergeant stretched out his arm and pointed.

"Luk, sorr! Do ye see thim?"

And in the dimness Tony made out advancing toward the trench a gray mass, huge and indistinct and vague.

He gulped unsteadily. Were the Germans so near as that then? Ought he not to be doing something? Did Shannon know?

And then, as in a dream, he heard in succession his own voice giving the word of command, "Number five platoon—at the enemy in front—rapid fire!" the answering volleys from the rifles of his men, and a wild cheering, unlike the deep cheers of British troops, from the foe. Like the oncoming of a wall, the Germans advanced. Tony, fighting back the fears that had gripped him, shivered.

"Let them have it, South Irish!" he said. "Let them have it!"

His men were strangely restive. Their firing was ragged. Three or four were not even firing at all.

"What's the matter, there?" said Tony. "You, Reilly, you're not wounded, are you?"

At another time these same men would have resisted to the death. But now, either one night's waiting, or the mystery and chill of the dawn, or the suddenness of the attack, had sapped their resolution, for without waiting, without warning, as if the movement were prearranged or ordered, they clambered out of their trench and ran.

Tony, knowing that if they left him his only hope of hiding his fears was gone, made a half-hearted, despairing effort to stop their flight.

"—— you!" he cried, and his voice was lost in the crash of musketry from the right and in front. "—— you, you fools! Get back! What the blazes do you think you're doing?"

"Go on, bhoys!" shouted a man. "They're on top of us, the divils!"

Tony staggered against a tree, overborne by the rush. The bullets from the Germans, who advanced firing from the hip, were swishing through the branches. A man stumbled and dropped his rifle, then went on slowly, limping. Another shrieked in mortal agony and fell.

And that settled it, so far as Tony Mallagh was concerned. He turned and ran, without a thought save for his own safety. Was he to be left to face the Germans single-handed? Was he to be killed, for the sake of a mere, outworn tradition? Was not his life as valuable to himself as the life

of any private, and was it not much more valuable to the regiment?

He had made his way at a quick, shuffling run, almost to the other side of the small wood when his foot caught in a projecting root. He tripped and fell. His head crashed against a tree-trunk and he knew no more until faintly, as if at a great distance, he seemed to hear a voice calling his name.

"Tony, old chap, come on, what is it?"

Shannon's voice, surely!

Tony opened his eyes, to find himself in the wood, huddled against a tree, with the sun just risen, showing like a red orb through the mist, and Shannon on his knees beside him. His head throbbed. He felt dazed and stupid. He put his hand to his forehead and brought it away, covered with blood. Two or three privates stood looking at him. One was wounded.

"Hullo! Why—why——"

"Feeling better?" said Shannon. "We haven't much time to spare, you know."

He noticed then that Shannon was staring at him in a curious way, almost as if he were angry or disappointed or puzzled. He tried to think. Shannon helped him to his feet.

"We've got to be moving, and pretty quick," he said. "They'll be coming on again in a minute or two."

Taking him by the arm, he hurried him off.

"Who'll be coming on?" asked Tony.

And then a dull feeling of horror crept over him. He had turned his back on the enemy. The others had beaten them off; he had run. Did Shannon know? Had he seen him make off? Surely not. It had been too dark. And then . . . .

"Not going too fast, am I?" said Shannon suddenly.

"No," said Tony. "My head aches, but I'm better. Much better. And, what—what happened?"

"You ought to know, Tony. What were you doing, eh?" There was a note of doubt in Shannon's voice.

"My fellows bolted. God only knows why!"

"Some of them did. Not all. But what about you, man? What were you doing? Where were you going?"

"Me! I went after them—to rally them. To try and get them back. And as I was doing my best to turn them, I caught my foot and fell. That's all I remember." He ended abruptly.

"Oh!" said Shannon. "I understand. I wondered."

"Looked queer, perhaps," said Tony with a nervous laugh.

"Oh, nonsense! Might have happened to any one."

And Tony felt that a burden had been lifted from off his mind. Shannon understood. Shannon knew now that he had been rallying his men. His secret was safe. But there remained in his consciousness the dread that when next the hour of trial came, when he should be tested once more, he should fail again. For whatever might be believed of him, the truth remained. He, an officer in the Royal South Irish Fusiliers, had run in action.

They joined the rest of the battalion.

"Hullo, Tony, what's wrong? Not wounded, are you?" One of the other subalterns spoke to him.

"Not exactly," said Tony. "Fell and cut my head open."

"Hard luck! Some of your people arrived back here some time ago, looking like lost sheep."

"I know. I tried to stop them."

"Shouldn't worry, old thing. They'll not do it again."

"Hope not, anyway," said Tony.

Shannon was troubled. Even in the fighting that followed, for the Germans attacked once more, and in the retirement early in the afternoon, at the back of his mind, obtruding itself when least expected, was a strange wonderment.

Tony had run, of course. That was obvious. But why? And to hide the truth he had lied. Had he tried to rally his men he would not have followed them so far. What fear was it that had driven him to do what no man should do and call himself a man? Had he been seized with sudden panic? Or could it be that Tony Mallagh, as good a man as ever walked—Tony, the boxer, the best rider in the battalion, Tony, the man who had fought the greengrocer at Portsmouth, was a coward! To Shannon it seemed impossible. And yet it was true Tony had turned his back on the enemy and run. Why?

And then there was Sybil. Sybil waiting at home for news! And Shannon, remembering that last evening in the little drawing-room and how proudly she had talked

of Tony, felt a sudden wild anger. Tony, her husband, had proved himself unworthy.

After this Shannon noticed many things about Tony Mallagh that were puzzling. He studied him under fire, on the march and in billets. By the time that the retreat had ended he had changed greatly. He looked years older, tired, dispirited. He was cool enough in action, that was evident, almost too cool. At a glance it seemed as if he held himself in check. He was cheerful, after a fashion; he still talked in the same amusing, self-assertive manner; he bore, without murmuring or showing himself impatient, every hardship and discomfort; he showed no sign of weariness nor doubt of victory; he was firm with his men, yet always kind and considerate.

Nevertheless there remained to Shannon the memory of the morning when Tony had chosen dishonor rather than face death. Men did run in action, of course. Sometimes even the best were liable to panic. But that Tony Mallagh should have proved himself a coward was to Shannon almost as if he himself had been detected in some wrong.

True to his promise, he wrote to Sybil at the first opportunity, a few lines scribbled in pencil—

Tony is splendid; you have no idea. He is happy and contented, always. I have heard no word of complaint from him at any time. And he is as brave in battle as any man could be. The men worship him. Honestly, you would think to see him that he had been fighting all his life. He took to it naturally, like a duck takes to water. The best subaltern in the battalion, that's what they call him. We are all very proud of him. He fights as if he were playing football or boxing. If you should imagine from anything he writes to you that he has reason to be disappointed or worried, perhaps, do not pay any attention. It is not true. We all of us think he has done splendidly, from the Colonel downward.

And the part about the Colonel was, as he discovered soon after writing, quite true. For the Colonel thought well of Tony.

"I'm not saying a word against the rest of 'em," he said, "but Tony Mallagh's the best—far and away the best. I'm very satisfied, indeed."

"Yes, sir," Shannon nodded. "We've as good a crowd of subalterns in the South Irish as you'd want."

"And he's not foolish like young O'Connell, for instance. O'Connell er—seems all the time bent on—well, on showing off. Tony Mallagh's sound. Looks after his men, keeps 'em in hand, won't let 'em kill themselves off just for effect. And you know yourself, Shannon, what that means with a crowd like we've got. No, I'm very pleased with young Mallagh, very pleased, indeed. He's steadied down immensely of late—since he's been married, in fact. Good wife he's got, too. Very good! Yes, I'm pleased with him. He'll go far."

And, as Shannon discovered, the men were of a like opinion.

THE regiment had halted for a brief rest one night and the men were bivouacked in a large field. The rifles were stacked; the smoke of the fires drifted upward; the sky was a dull orange in the west. Men were scattered about on the grass, smoking or sleeping, worn out by the day's toil, waiting for their evening meal.

Shannon coming in from the pickets stopped to speak to the company Sergeant-Major. He had said all he had wanted to, and was about to move off, when the voices of a group of men seated only a few yards distant drew his attention.

"Did ye see him today whin owld McGinnis was like to dhrop with fatigue, an' his feet worn to ribbons by the dint of the marchin' we're afther havin'? A good lad is Misther Mallagh, an' no mistake."

"He's unbelaivably sthrick."

"An' with raison. For what wud the reg'mint be like if he warn't, with malingerers an' skrimshankers in it like you, Tim Rafferty?"

There was a laugh at this and another began to speak.

"There's wan fault in him, an' to my way of thinkin' the greathest fault that a soldhier can have. He's a good little man, I'm not denyin' the same, but he ought to be betther. He takes his fightin' too aisy, without judgmint. If he cud but remimber now that we are not at anny fiel'-day, but that the inemy are thryin' their besht fer to kill us, he'd be as good a man as ye'd want. There's somethin' he lacks. He's no inmity agin' the Gerrmans. But, on the day that he first gits angry, ye'll see great things. There'll be no howldin' him."

Shannon was startled.

"That's funny," he said. "Did you hear, Telford, what the men were saying just then?"

"About Misther Mallagh, sorr? I heard that, sorr. I dunno' but what they're right,

too. Thrust the men to pick out the wake point in an orf'cer, whin it comes to a matther of fightin'. An' Misther Mallagh, sorr, for all that he's as good a young orf'cer as ye'd want over ye, has not yit been worrked up to the pitch where he fights as if ivry wan of the Gerrmans was a privut, personal inemy. He's too cowld an' collected. Wait till he gits angry."

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN AT THE FARM

LATE in the afternoon Tony Mallagh and some dozen or so men strung out in open order, made their way down a steep wooded hill-slope toward a small farm, tucked away in the narrow valley. The day was very hot and still, the sky a deep blue, flecked with white clouds. Guns thundered incessantly in the distance.

At the edge of the wood, where the trees grew thin, Tony halted and let his eyes wander from right to left, suspicious of danger. Across a field of bleached stubble lay the farmhouse, small and white, with a red-tiled roof, overgrown with moss and ivy, and showing no sign of life save the thin trickle of smoke from the chimney. Beyond was a large barn and outbuildings, a well and an apple-orchard. Further off again were more trees and the ridge that made up the opposite slope of the valley.

"Purty as a picthure," said one of the men. "Sure, it puts me in mind of Kerry."

"Don't see any one around, do you, Sergeant-Major?" said Tony. "But we'd better be careful."

"There'll be no Germans lift this way, sorr, if that's what ye mane."

"There's a cow yonda, sorr. By the threes."

"I think," said Tony deliberately, "that we'll investigate. Corporal Birkett, you, and Kelly, you, just work 'round to the left, will you. O'Connor and Madden bear away to the right." He paused. "And I think the rest of us can risk walking right up to the front door."

"Mebbe there'll be such a thing as a dhrink o' milk to be had for the axin'," said a private cheerfully. "Or beer."

As they drew near the house, a woman came to the door and stood looking toward them with a hand shielding her eyes from the glare of the sun.

"I wondher now can she sphake English?" said the Sergeant-Major doubtfully.

"Niver yit do I remimber meetin' anny wan what cudn't, save an' ixciptin' that Gerrman orf'cer what we caught in the dhrain two mornin's back—him that swore so fluent in his own tongue whin Tim Dolan dhropped his rifle on top of him."

Tony opened the little wooden gate and walked up the path between masses of flowers. When he was within a few paces of the woman he halted and saluted. She looked at him with a grave face and then as if reassured gave a little nervous bow. A small girl ran out and clung shyly to her skirts. From the back of the house there arose the frantic barking of a dog and the voice of Private O'Connor uttering soothing sounds.

Racking his memory for the right words, Tony began to speak in French, slowly and badly. The woman laughed.

"*N'importe*," she said. "*Je parle Anglais*—a little. Is it not so? And, monsieur is English?"

Tony nodded, surprised.

From behind his back came a low whisper.

"She's makin' a big mistake. It's Irish we are. South Irish. Corrk, Tipperary. The place it's a long way to."

"Have you had any Germans here?" asked Tony.

She shook her head. They had seen no soldiers at all. Not one. No Germans had come into the valley. Not yet at least. Nor would they. Not now. She made a little gesture of contempt with her hands. They were going. Like frost before the sun. She had no fear of Germans. Why should she have? She was only a woman, doing the work that the good God had given her. Who would harm her? Not even the Germans.

"But," said Tony, "are you here all by yourself? Aren't there any men—belonging to the place? Haven't you a husband?"

To Tony it seemed impossible that a woman should be living with her children alone in the midst of a battle. Surely she must have some man who could help, if help were needed!

Her husband! The woman laughed proudly. Where would he be at such a time? He was fighting—*pour la patrie*. She hoped, she said, that he was killing Germans. He had left her when war broke out. She might not see him again till the

Boches were driven back across the Rhine. If he should die— She gave a shrug of her shoulders. "*Monsieur, soyez certain que qu'il mourra bien.*"

There was no man nearer the farm, she added, than those in the little town across the hill, only her father. But would the officer care to step inside and see for himself? He saw strangers seldom, her father. It would cheer him up. Also, there was milk to be had, and some cider, and perhaps an egg or so.

Tony glanced at the little group of dirty, unshaven Irishmen in their war-worn khaki.

"Telford," he said to the Sergeant-Major, "come along in, and see what her father's like. Queer, eh?"

They entered the house. In the little kitchen which was very clean and neat, with a stone floor and low ceiling and a row of red geraniums in flower-pots on the long window-sill, there sat a withered little old man, with bowed shoulders and wrinkled face and bright eyes. He smiled at Tony, but made no attempt to rise from the big chair in which he was seated in front of the stove.

"*Bon jour, m'sieu'*," said Tony.

The little old man, who was dressed in black and about whose legs was a shawl of some reddish plaid stuff, nodded and smiled and said a few words in a high, thin voice so quickly that Tony could not grasp their meaning. He turned to the woman.

"He helps you in the work, eh?"

She shook her head, as if such a thing were unheard of.

"Once. Not now. See, monsieur." And then Tony, seeing the crutches leaning against the wall, understood.

"Poor old chap, I'm sorry."

The woman's face clouded suddenly. It was sad. He was helpless, able to walk only with such pain and labor. Helpless. Since five years now he had done nothing. He was not old, but he had aged greatly. His grief when war came—ah, but it was terrible! In 1870 he had been too young to fight; now he was unable. She spoke to the little man and he smiled at her and nodded his head.

"Aren't you afraid to stay here, so near the fighting?" asked Tony.

"And if I left, monsieur, who would look after the farm? The men go to the war for their country's safety, and honor. May not a woman work? Where would the harvest have been but for me? And I am strong, monsieur, as strong almost as my man himself who is a soldier." She laughed. "And if I left, monsieur, where would I go? Also—" she nodded toward the opposite corner of the room where in a cradle between the window and a tall oak dresser lay a baby soundly sleeping—"one has responsibilities, is it not? And where should I go? To Paris! No, monsieur. If my man returns and finds me gone, what would he think? Does a soldier desert his regiment, or his flag? No more does a woman desert her home. I have my duty, even as my husband. If I stay here no one will do me harm. A woman with two little ones is safe."

Tony watched her while she spoke. Hard work, and she must have worked hard since her husband left, had not stolen away her looks. She was well built, not tall, but straight and strong and slender. Her skin was a warm dusky bronze, with a rich red in her cheeks; her hair was a golden brown; her eyes were blue. Once she must have been pretty he was certain. She was that now, indeed, if she were nicely dressed.

The woman was filling a jug from a cask that stood by the dresser, still chattering away in her queer, clipped English, as if glad to have the chance to air her knowledge.

The cider was good, she said, of her own making. Her husband had said that her cider was better than any. And he was a judge. She straightened her back and laughed happily.

And then like the flashing of a searchlight in the darkness it came over Tony that there was something about her, an indefinable something, that put him in mind of Sybil. His lips twisted into a little smile of amusement at the fancy. Like Sybil! But, of course, that was ridiculous! Was he to compare a French farmer's wife with Sybil? As well might he compare Telford, strong and active and healthy, with the little cripple in the arm-chair.

But was the fancy, as he had termed it, so foolish? She did not resemble Sybil in the very least and yet there was a likeness. Her eyes were the same blue, her hair was the same golden-brown. Even her laugh had the same joyous freshness as had Sybil's. And when asked a question of which she was not quite sure, she had the same trick of raising her eyebrows before answering.

Moreover, there was the certainty that as this girl had spoken of her husband fighting for his country, so also would Sybil speak of him.

The French woman approached, a glass of cider in each hand.

"But, perhaps, monsieur would prefer some wine?"

Tony shook his head. The cider would do splendidly.

"And you're not afraid to be here by yourself?" he asked. "It's very brave of you, but I think somehow it's running a great risk. You're so very near the fighting. And we don't know which way it may go."

She shrugged her shoulders. The good God would preserve her. She knew it. No harm would come if she stayed at home and did the work of the farm.

Tony set down his empty glass.

"Very good, indeed," he said. "*Tres bon.*"

The woman held out the jug. Would monsieur care for some more then? He shook his head and smiled. No, he had had sufficient. They ought to be moving on. If she had a glass or so to spare for the men, though, he would be grateful. She nodded and led the way out of the little kitchen into the sunshine where the soldiers were waiting.

While they drank she watched them with an air of pride and good-nature, and when Tony offered to pay, refused firmly. No, they were fighting for France, for her, for her children. Money, no! It was a pleasure.

Tony beckoned to the little girl and when she came to him, smiling shyly, put a gold coin into her tiny palm.

"*Merci, m'sieu'*," she said, and running to her mother hid her rosy cheeks in her skirts.

"Where did you learn English?" asked Tony suddenly. "You speak very well indeed. Have you been in England?"

She laughed and shook her head. In England! No, never. What little English she knew, she had learned from an English lady and gentleman for whom she had cooked in Paris. A fine couple, generous to a degree, but so simple! They had stayed a Winter and Spring in Paris to learn French. They had learned no more than a few words, that went without saying, but —again she shrugged her shoulders—but she herself, she had had to learn English. And she laughed once more, as if it had been the greatest joke in the world, and as if the men before her were her own friends and countrymen, and not soldiers of another nation on active service, warning her that the fighting was near and might come nearer.

"Well," said Tony, "we must go now. Maybe we'll see you again. *Au revoir*, madame, and good luck."

They went away, past the barn and sheds and the orchard at the back of the house to the wooded slope on the opposite side of the valley.

When they reached the foot of the hill, Tony turned and looked back. The little farm with its meadows and orchard was like some quiet haven far from the world's trouble and turmoil. For the first time since the morning when he had left home, there had stolen into Tony Mallagh's consciousness a sense of restfulness and peace. There was no war. Men no longer killed and wounded each other to show their love for their countries. The booming of the big guns that never ended became as the murmuring of waves on the shore. In the valley one might live and be happy. Even he, Tony Mallagh, of the South Irish.

And as he gazed he saw the woman standing at the back of the house. He waved his hand in farewell, and with a little sigh followed his men.

"Funny, isn't it," he said to the company Sergeant-Major, "that a woman should stop here all alone with fighting so near! Plucky of her, of course."

"It is so," said Telford. "But I'm thinkin' she's as safe where she is as she'd be if she moved We've no manes of knowin' how matthers are goin' yit, but from what we have seen this past few days, an' the way we're afther pushin' ahead, it luks like the Germans can do nothin' but go back where they come from."

For a time Tony said nothing. When he spoke again they were nearing the crest of the ridge.

"It's rough on her having to be by herself, isn't it? And she' so everlastingly cheerful. That's what beats me. You wouldn't think her husband was away fighting, would you? He may be dead by this time for all she knows, too."

And once more he thought of Sybil, at home, wondering if he were still alive, hoping and trusting, yet never knowing what

minute might bring the news that would take from her life all hope of happiness.

"It's harrd on the women, is war," said Telford. "You an' me, sorr, we're men, an' what do we know what fears that poor sowl down in the valley yonda is sufferin'? An' what's more, we'll niver see her again to find out what's become of her."

In this the Sergeant-Major was wrong.

THAT night Tony found a letter from Sybil awaiting him, the first he had had at the front.

DEAREST:

I am wondering where you will be when you get this, or if indeed you will get it at all. I have heard from you four times already, and when your last letter was written you had not had so much as a line from me. But, dear, I have written more than a dozen times. You don't think, Tony dear, that I haven't, do you? I hate to think of your wondering why I don't write, for I did, Tony, really and truly. And I sent off parcels of socks and shirts, for the nights will be cold out of doors. And there were also some cigarettes and cake and chocolate. I do hope, dearest, that something has reached you by now.

I have no news. And the little I have had I told you in my other letters. If you have had them you will know. But it's nothing more than each day the same as the day before. I am very happy with Mrs. Carne. She is a perfect dear. We do a good deal of sewing and knitting, socks and things, for the troops. And we read the papers, all of them, and are so proud to hear that the South Irish have done so well. We heard there was a wounded soldier at the London Hospital who belonged to the South Irish, so we went to see him. He was a man called O'Sullivan, in Mr. Packman's platoon, and so interesting. He had seen you in the retreat after Mons, and he said that you were so brave and cheerful, and kind. Oh, my dear, my dear! I nearly cried when he told us. You are having such hardships out at the front, and here am I at home, safe and living in comfort while you are fighting. It seems unfair.

Tony, I never realized how much you were—are to me while I had you at home. Now, I know. You're everything, my dear, everything. And sometimes I wake up at night with a start and imagine I can hear the guns in the distance and I wonder whether you are lying out in the open, and if it is raining and cold, and where you are. My dear, you are never out of my thoughts. I pray for you night and morning, and sweetheart—don't laugh dear—whenever I've nothing particular to do, whenever I find myself with a minute or two to spare—and that's very often, alas!—I say little prayers to God that He will bring you back to me. I know He will. I feel certain. And I know, love, that you will fight bravely and make your men feel I was so glad to know that they liked and admired you so much. Sullivan, poor chap, has lost both his arms. Isn't it awful? I do not know what he will do when he gets better. We are hoping that the Government pension will be really enough for him and his wife to live on.

And now, dear, I must end. I do pray that this cruel war may soon be over, and that the South Irish will help to win the victory that is coming. And the day can't come too soon, Tony mine, when I shall see you again. But I am so proud of you, Tony dear. And I just hate and despise any man that at the present time will not see that he is wanted, and that it is his duty to train and prepare himself to fight for his country.

With love, old boy, and heaps of good luck,

from SYBIL.

P. S.—Poor Mrs. Keane! I was so sorry for her when she had news that her husband was taken prisoner. She was so sad about it. But I comforted her by saying that there was one thing good in the news, and that was that he was safe at least. If he was a prisoner of war he would at least be out of the fighting. And that cheered her up quite a lot. We hear that his wound is not as bad as it might have been. Major Carne wrote and told her. But she felt that it was such a blow on poor Captain Keane to be out of everything from now on.

Tony read and reread the letter. He could almost see Sybil as she wrote it, and he felt that though far away in the flesh, in the spirit she was very near. Had he ever realized properly, in the past, in those few short dream-weeks when they had been man and wife, the depth of feeling in a woman's heart? The letter told him far more fully than the mere words could express what Sybil thought of him, how much her happiness depended on his safe return. Supposing he were killed! It almost hurt him, like some physical pain, to think what life would be for her, the loneliness, the dreariness. If it was bad now, what would it be if he were dead?

He folded the letter and placed it in his pocketbook. What was the use of fretting? Worry would only make things the harder to bear. Because his country was at war he must risk his life. A feeling of sick helplessness came over him. He might be killed at any moment of the day or night.

Nothing could save him. Nothing, except to turn and run. And would that help? Sybil was proud of him. Proud! Oh, God! Proud of a man who was a coward at heart, who had deserted his post in battle, who had to fight his own fears at every turn. And at that the helplessness gave way to a fierce anger. —— war! Why should a man, a free man, consent to do what his whole being loathed. Why? Because he had to. Because there was no escape. He laughed.

"Hullo, young feller, why the mirth?"

Shannon, big and broad and smiling, had entered the little room. Tony felt a sudden

envy. What cares had Shannon? Shannon had no one at home depending on him. Shannon went into action free from anxiety. What did Shannon know of the sorrow and grief of parting?

"Just heard from Sybil," he said.

"Ah!" Shannon's square, sunburnt face became very serious. "Ah! and how is she? Fit, I hope."

"I think so," said Tony. "Seems to be. She's a little worried, of course."

"Of course!" said Shannon, and he nodded his head once or twice as if he could understand and sympathize, which, thought Tony bitterly, was the one thing a man like Shannon could not do.

He understand? He sympathize? Why, Shannon had no more feeling about him than a graven image! His whole existence was bound up in the regiment. Anything beyond had no interest. A good chap, that much Tony granted, a splendid soldier, none better, a brave man, but in some ways strangely stupid.

Shannon seated himself on a high-backed chair at the opposite end of the table. The room was rather dark, lit only by one dim oil lamp, hanging from the ceiling. Red-hot embers glowed in the small grate; occasionally ashes fell into the hearth. In a corner wrapped in a blanket one of the other subalterns was sleeping.

Tony raised his eyes to find Shannon gazing at him with a puzzled expression.

"Aren't you going to get any sleep tonight, Tony?" he asked. "It's latish, you know, and we're as likely as not to be routed up by four."

"Dunno'," said Tony. "I'm not tired. As a matter of fact, I'm not sleeping very well these nights."

"Huh!" Shannon grunted. "Why don't you speak of it then, eh? You can't do much if you're not sleeping, you know."

For a minute or so there was silence in the little room. Tony rested his chin on his knuckles and gazed at the blue of the sky that showed through the open window and pondered.

Why had Shannon said that he could do no good unless he slept? Did that mean that he was in fact doing badly? Were people talking of him behind his back? Was the secret, that he had guarded with such jealous care, common property in the regiment? Had Shannon known all along that he had run from the Germans in panic? Had he known that his excuse of rallying his men had been untrue? Perhaps even now he pitied him.

He leaned forward, seized with a sudden determination to learn the worst.

"Would you mind if I asked you a question, sir? It's rather important."

"Ask away, son. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Well—well—" Tony reddened. It was harder than he had expected. "Well, sir, it's this: How do you think I'm doing?"

"I think you're doing very well," said Shannon deliberately. "Very well, indeed."

Tony considered. The answer was satisfactory, as far as it went. Did it go far enough?

"Have you seen anything to make you think I don't care for fighting, sir? Or that I'm afraid when we're in action?"

"Afraid!" said Shannon. "Nonsense!" But to himself he said: "Now, what's he driving at? What is it he's trying to tell me?"

"Sometimes," said Tony, "I think I'm scared."

"Nine-tenths of the men who go under fire for the first time are."

"Then you wouldn't call me a coward," persisted Tony.

Shannon frowned.

"What the devil's wrong with you tonight, Tony? A coward! No. Don't be an idiot! You're as good as any man in the regiment. I'll tell you one thing, though, and that is——"

He shot a quick glance at Tony. "You don't mind my speaking plainly, do you?"

"Very glad, sir, if you would," said Tony, and his heart began to beat a trifle faster. But now that his doubts were set at rest, Shannon might say whatever he choose. Compared with what he had thought, nothing mattered.

"I'm not quite sure what it is," continued Shannon, "or whether indeed it's anything at all, but you give the impression, Tony, of—well, of not being interested in your work."

Tony nodded nervously.

"I'm interested enough, in a way." He stopped short, wondering what in the world Shannon meant. Not interested! "I don't quite understand," he said. "I shouldn't like the war to go on forever, sir, of course."

"Nobody would," said Shannon dryly.

"It's the uselessness of the whole thing that I hate most," said Tony.

"Is that the sum total of your impressions?" asked Shannon. "I'd like to know what you really do think about it."

"It's hard to say," said Tony, and he felt rather uncomfortable and ill at ease. "I'm a soldier and I have to fight. That I know. But—why should *I* have to kill Germans? I don't hate them. All I can think of in action is that the men we're pumping lead into, the men who are trying to attack us and are being wiped out, are men like we are; that there are wives in Germany waiting for news—wives and mothers and daughters—just as Sybil at home waits for news of me. Poor devils! It makes me sick to see the way they go down when they attack in those masses of theirs. It's murder. Poor wretched conscripts! And being driven on by their officers. You've seen them, eh? Like cattle being driven to the slaughter-house. Why?" He ended abruptly.

Shannon was bewildered, out of his depth.

"D'you mean to tell me, Tony Mallagh, that you go into action with thoughts like those. Good Lord, man, it's a mystery to me you don't take to your heels and bolt!" He saw the sudden shame and fear in Tony's face, and hurried on. "Don't you realize that those fathers and husbands and brothers of yours are doing their darn'dest to kill you and me and the rest of us? You kill or be killed. There's no other alternative. Do you think they'd have any mercy on you just because you've a wife at home?"

"No-o," said Tony doubtfully. "Of course not."

There came into Shannon's mind the memory of the conversation he had overheard some nights before.

"Tony," he said. "War's not a game. It's dead earnest. There's only one way to end it quickly and that's by smashing the men we're fighting. Half measures won't do. You're too —— casual about it. I wonder what you'd be like if you got angry. If you're thinking how hard it is on the Germans to be wiped out by our chaps, you'll never do any good.

"And, Tony, remember this: though you're in France you're fighting to keep the Germans out of your own country. And you're fighting for Sybil. And if you'll take my advice you'll get angry and fight as if every German was a personal, particular enemy of your own who was trying to smash up your home and all that you have. If you do that, if you once lose your temper, and see red, well—remembering the story of the greengrocer's horse and the fight at Portsmouth, you'll be hard to beat."

Tony sighed a trifle wearily. Shannon had meant to be kind, of course. But he didn't understand. How could he?

As for the advice he had given, it was useless. Had he not enough to do as it was, without worrying his head about matters of no importance? With heartfelt thankfulness he realized that his secret was safe. But for how long? The foe that *he* fought was not the German army, neither horse nor foot nor guns, but himself. Would the day ever come when he could claim the victory? The knowledge of what he really was, sickened him. For Sybil's sake he must live; for Sybil's sake he must overcome his fear.

He laughed abruptly, and then forced a yawn.

"Lord! I'm tired. I think I'll turn in, sir. It was awfully good of you to have told me all that. I'll remember." He stood up and collected his belongings. "Hope there'll be a mail soon again. It's like Heaven hearing from home occasionally. That's the worst of being out here—you're lost."

And the last thing he saw as he dropped off to sleep was Shannon seated in the high-backed chair, his elbows on the table, his head propped by his hands, as one deep in thought.

CHAPTER VI

THE HARVEST

IN THE three days that followed, though the battle continued with unabated fury, stretching over a vast frontage, the South Irish Fusiliers saw but little of the actual fighting, being in reserve. For this Tony was devoutly thankful. The rest put fresh heart into him.

And then one morning when the mists were fading before the sun, a platoon was sent forward to reconnoitre and occupy a hill. Thus it was that shortly before noon Tony Mallagh saw from the slope of the thickly-wooded ridge the small valley and the farm and remembered once more the woman who had reminded him of Sybil.

"I wonder if there've been any Germans around since we were here last," he said, and a corporal standing near him shook his head.

"By the luk of the house, sorr, 'tis the same."

"Maybe it is," said Tony, "but it might be worth our while making sure."

They pushed their way through thickets and tangled undergrowth, under the shade of tall oaks, as fair and full of God's glory as if the grim carnage of war were but a mortal dream, until in a clearing lit by the sun, half-way down the hill, they came across a man who lay on his back, a Highlander, his blind eyes staring up into the blue, his face set in a mocking smile, a line of blood marking his last, lonely pilgrimage on earth.

Tony shivered. The men had halted and were waiting, uncertain, peering through the screen of trees.

"Now, I wonder," said Tony half to himself, "I wonder what brought him here. Poor devil!"

"He wasn't killed here, sorr," said Telford. "It was on the top of the hill he was wounded, he came to the valley to die. Maybe he was makin' for the farrm."

Tony glanced over his shoulder.

"Corporal Birkett, I'll get you, and O'Connor, you, to go forward and see if there's any sign of the enemy. There won't be. They couldn't have got in here, or we'd have seen 'em, but we'll make sure. We'll wait at the edge of the field and have you covered in case— Understand!"

They watched the two men crossing the yellow stubble. Everything was very still. The farm seemed even more desolate and forsaken than it had been the first time they had seen it. A heavy silence seemed to brood over the whole place, a silence that was broken at intervals by the crash and re-echoing roar of artillery.

Telford uttered a sudden, half-choked exclamation.

"Luk there, sorr, at the top of the roof, will ye? There's a piece that's missin', an'—sorr, was there no chimney at all, at all!"

The two scouts had reached the door of the house, and it seemed to Tony, a dull anxiety numbing his heart, that they started back in horror.

"Come on," he said, "there are no Germans there anyhow." And he hastened on down the slope in the direction of the farm, outstripping his men.

At the little gate leading to the front garden, O'Connor made as if to stop him.

"Sorr, there's nothin' lift—nothin'."

With a curt nod Tony passed on and stood at the doorway peering in at what had only a few short days before, been the kitchen.

He felt as if some power had robbed him of his senses. He saw, but he could not attach any meaning to what was before his eyes. The effect was clear, the cause was lacking.

The ceiling and part of the wall opposite had gone. The blue sky and the green trees and a shattered barn showed in the gap. The floor, once so white and clean, was covered with débris, rubble and plaster and brick and woodwork. The table in the center of the room was broken. The oak dresser stood to all appearance undamaged, but its neat rows of crockery ware, the cups and saucers and dishes and jugs had been cast down as if by some gigantic hand, obeying some devil's will.

Tony shook off the stupor that bound him and entered.

Against the stove, crumpled up like a bundle of old clothes, discarded after years of use, thrown carelessly aside, was the little old man, the woman's father, the stone hearth smeared and splashed with dried blood.

Tony stared at him with a feeling of cold fear gripping his heart. Nor could he have spoken, had he been ordered.

There were footsteps behind him. He turned and saw Telford.

"God dheliver us! They're afther shellin' the place. Then—then, then, what in the name of all that's howly—what's become of the woman what give us the dhrink?"

Through the open doorway on his left Tony could see a pile of rubbish, like that in the room in which he now stood, bricks and mortar and beams of wood, with a glimpse of the farmyard, the dark green of the trees and the slope of the hill beyond, taking the place of the wall which was once there.

Nerving himself to do his duty, he entered.

On her knees, crouching by the side of a big, old-fashioned bed, was the woman. Her whole attitude betokened terror, a terror that was far beyond her strength to bear. Her face was turned away, hidden from view, her shoulders were bowed, in her arms she held her baby, with one hand shielding its head.

Tony approached softly, spoke to her in a husky voice, then touched her. She did not move. Great beads of perspiration trickled down his cheeks, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. And at last, by an effort, he found his voice.

"What is it?" he asked hoarsely. "What is it? Tell me, can't you?"

He tugged at her arm, tugged and tugged, until unresisting, strangely limp, she moved and he saw her face. Her cheeks were pale, her eyes closed, her white teeth pressed into her lower lip, and under the mass of heavy golden hair, hair that was so like Sybil's—Sybil waiting at home for news of him—was red blood, blood that had trickled down over her forehead, down her other cheek, on to the bed.

Unable to bear the sight, Tony dropped her arm and turned away. His men watched him with curious eyes, silent, apprehensive.

"God!" he whispered. "Oh, my God! Did you see her? Did you see what they've done?"

"What is it, Misther Mallagh?" said Telford. "Ah! don't now, don't let it be disturrbin' ye. Poor things, sure, an' they're out of harrm's way, an' with their throubles inded."

"Both of them," said Tony. "Both. It was the one shell that did it. The one shell, Telford, do you hear me? Oh, my God! Let's get out of it. And they wouldn't leave when I told them. Telford, you heard yourself, didn't you? It isn't my fault, it isn't, is it?"

He staggered out of the ruined house into the open air, shaking in every limb, his senses reeling.

The farm-yard was wrecked beyond repairing: barns and out-houses were crumbling ruins. A few melancholy hens wandered to and fro. A horse lay dead by the well, its legs stretched stiffly out.

O'Connor approached slowly, a dead rooster in one hand, his rifle in the other, his red, dirty face strangely serious.

"Sorr, was there not a little gerrl as well?" he asked.

"Well!" said Tony sharply. "Well!"

"I think, sorr, that we have found her."

"Alive?"

The man gave a hard laugh. "Sorr, she is not. Alive? Mother of Jasus! Would ye say that if ye'd seen her? She was frightened, poor little gerrl, an' ran. For yer pace of mind this night, sorr, an' for manny a night afther, ye'll have no wish to luk. Does a shell give life or beauty where it burrshts?"

"I've seen enough," said Tony. "I've seen enough. There's no mercy in war, not in this war. They take them all—men, women, and even the children. Is there one that they'd spare?" He turned on his heel and went wearily back to the house. "Sergeant-Major!"

"Sorr!" said Telford.

"They've gone, all of them."

"The little gerrl, sorr?"

"Yes." He paused. "Telford, I think I'll leave you here, while I go on with a dozen or so men to the top of the hill. I just want to—to have a look the other side of the ridge. You'd better follow me as soon as you've—you've——"

He broke short, abruptly. His head was throbbing as with fever. He felt sick and dazed. Thoughts came and went haphazard. A fierce anger burned within him; a hatred of war; a horror of what he had seen. For he knew, as surely as if he had been told, that never while he had life in his body—never, sleeping or waking, would he forget, would he shut out of mind the things he had seen that day. And this was war—war, the magnificent; war that men worshiped.

The Sergeant-Major was looking at him with a curious intensity of gaze. He shivered as if chilled to the bone.

"Maybe you'll find some spades and picks in the barn," he said, "or what's left of it—and—and anywhere'll do for the grave, Telford; anywhere you like."

THE South Irish were bivouacking in an orchard near a small village. An unwonted cheerfulness seemed to have taken possession of the men. There were rumors coming from where no man knew, that in the morning the regiment was to be sent into action with the remainder of the division.

To Tony Mallagh, sick at heart, tortured by his own imaginings, pacing to and fro by himself, came Shannon.

"Tony, I want to speak to you."

Tony halted.

"Well," he said slowly, "what is it?"

The light of a fire threw a red reflection on to his worn face. Shannon stared at him, puzzled by his appearance. He looked

ill. All the life and strength and resolution seemed to have vanished.

"Hullo! Hullo! What's all this? What's the matter, Tony?"

"The matter!" Tony answered in a dull voice. "The matter, sir. Nothing."

The older man took him by the arm.

"Yes, there is," he said. "Better tell me. Perhaps I can help."

Tony laughed softly. Help! The very idea amused him. "Shannon," he said dropping his voice. "I'm sick of it. That's what's the matter. I'm sick of everything. There!"

Shannon whistled under his breath.

"Steady the Buffs! Come on, Tony, what is it?"

Tony, gazing across the open fields at the distant hills dark against the blue-gray sky, wondered if it were over those same hills that the South Irish were destined to fight their way on the morrow.

"There was a farmhouse in a small valley," he said. "I was there three days ago. I don't know when I've seen any place I liked so much—green woods, yellow cornfields, a farmhouse, covered with ivy, an orchard. The man was away fighting. The wife looked after the farm. You understand, sir. She did all the work, everything, and wasn't frightened. She had an old father, a cripple, and two kiddies. The Germans wouldn't harm her, she knew. And she was as happy and busy as if there were no war within a hundred miles. And then today——"

"Well," said Shannon quietly. "Today?"

"Today!" said Tony. "We went that way again. The back of the house was blown to pieces. A battery had had the wrong range or something. Even the airmen might have spotted the farm. Or they might have thought— Oh! God knows! I don't. I daren't think of it, too much. The old man was dead. So was the woman. She had her arms around her baby to save it from the shells. The baby was dead. And in the garden was the little girl. They didn't let me see her. She was dead, of course. Oh, yes, she was dead right enough. That's what we found when we passed there today.

"And me—God forgive me! There've been times when I thought that war brought out all that was best in man. Today—" he snapped his fingers—"today, Shannon, I understood what war was. They'd gone, each one of them. Wiped out. Smashed. And at the end of the war, perhaps, the husband will come home to find—what? Nothing. Only the grave and a wooden cross."

"But, Tony, listen." In spite of himself Shannon was troubled. "Tony, you know what war is by this time, don't you? It's cruel, yes, but——"

"Cruel!" said Tony. "So it seems. Shannon, I wish you could have seen that poor girl today, with the shell wound in her head and her arms around her poor dead baby. What harm had she done? None at all. She thought she was safe. Who'd touch a poor woman who had to work hard? God would preserve her. That's what she said. And a battery two miles away, perhaps, killed her.

"I'll never forget, Shannon. Never. And, Shannon, when I saw her that first time, it came over me that she looked like Sybil. Yes. It's a fact. Like Sybil. That makes it worse. War's killing women and little children and old men. Shells dropping on little houses. What's it matter to us? We're men and we're strong. War's good. It gives us a chance to win medals and V. C.'s and quick promotion. But the women —God help *them!* No one else will. And perhaps at home, in London, Sybil is wondering if I'm alive or dead, or—what? And —I dunno, I feel that my nerve's broken for good and all. I'm done."

"As bad as that, old chap?" Shannon patted his shoulder. "Tony, it's no use fretting. You've got to turn in. And—and you'll be feeling better in the morning. You see if you aren't. War's war, old son——"

Something seemed to snap in Tony's brain. He laughed harshly and walked off, leaving the other staring after him, bewildered and worried and somewhat frightened by his manner.

A square, thick-set figure passed him by.

"Is that you, Telford?"

"Sorr." The company Sergeant-Major saluted.

"Telford, what's happened to Mr. Mallagh?"

"He was all right this afthernoon, sorr," said Telford.

"You noticed nothing different about him then?"

"Well, sorr, mebbe he was a bit quiet like afther we seen where the Germans had

dhropped a few shells on top of a house. An' I don't wondher. It wasn't a sight ye could luk at an' not feel, sorr."

"Oh, I see! Thank you, Telford. It doesn't matter, I thought perhaps he was sick, that's all."

The Sergeant-Major drifted off. For some minutes Shannon did not move. And as he pondered on what Tony Mallagh had said, there came to his mind the thought of Sybil waiting at home and the memory of the evening when they had sat opposite each other in the small drawing-room and he had heard from her own lips why she had wanted him. Little more than a month had passed since then. It seemed impossible. Whole years could not have made more difference to her husband. And the future!

At that moment the future seemed to Shannon dark and dreary, full of misery and doubt and uncertainty. Supposing that on the morrow when the South Irish went into action Tony were once more to show himself a coward! Supposing that this time there would be no hiding it from others! Supposing he turned and ran, not in the gray of the dawn, but in broad day in full view of his company! Supposing he ran and lived! Would even Sybil consider his life worth the price he would have to pay?

Yet if ever a man had showed fear in his words and looks and manner, that man was Tony Mallagh.

CHAPTER VII

THE HONOR OF THE SOUTH IRISH

TO THE man who does the actual fighting, who goes into the firing-line and with rifle and bayonet endeavors to drive back the foe, a battle is but a grim dream, incoherent and vague, a series of disconnected incidents. His range of observation is limited. He knows what is happening in his immediate neighborhood and nowhere else. His regiment or brigade may be hurled forward in a fierce onslaught, their losses may appal him—surely this is the hardest fighting that man has ever seen—yet the attack may be but a feint, a mere pretense to cover the real attack elsewhere.

He and his comrades may be sacrificed so that others may win. He may be ordered to advance and retire, and then to advance once more, to all appearance without reason. And what he may think a defeat, judging from what he has seen with his own eyes, from the losses in his own regiment or company, may be as great a victory as ever army won.

Thus it was with the men of the South Irish. For, although they were in the firing line, one of the leading regiments in the movement, they knew but little of what was happening, even in their own immediate front.

By noon they had reached the shelter of a wood where they were told to wait. Later the German field-guns opened a heavy fire. A few men were killed and a few more wounded, and the stretcher-bearers were busy.

Murmurs came from the ranks.

"The curse of Cromwell on all Gerrmans! Where are they now? Why is there nothin' to be shootin' at?"

"Are we niver to go forward at all?"

"Sure, it's naythur shell-fire nor musketry nor yit charrgin' that's the worrst part of bein' in acthion; 'tis the iverlastin' settin' around doin' nothin' that wears a man more than annything."

Shannon came hurrying up just as a shell burst among the trees some yards in front of where a dozen or so privates were lying. They rose to their feet as one man and ran back. One fell on his face and did not move. From the enemy's position in front the crackle of musketry broke out. Bullets were wailing and whistling through the air with the sound as of a swarm of monstrous flies. A bugler coughed and slid over into a limp heap.

"Where are you men going?" asked Shannon sternly. "Get back at once, do you hear? Get back! Right back now!" They moved sullenly to where they had been waiting.

Shannon wondering if anything had happened to Tony Mallagh let his eyes wander quickly from side to side. The men lay in a natural gully or ditch that zigzagged along the slope of the hill. Some talked in low voices, others puffed at their pipes in silence, a few unmindful of the bullets, dozed. The sky showed blue in the gaps of the green overhead. Through the trees were glimpses of meadows and cornfields and woods, held by the enemy, all faint and flickering in the heat haze.

Shannon turned impatiently. Two men were carrying the wounded bugler away on

a stretcher. He watched them with a little frown. And then he saw the man for whom he had been looking.

Seated on a fallen tree-trunk some little distance behind the line of waiting soldiers, his shoulders bowed, his chin resting on the palm of his right hand, his elbow resting on his knees, was Tony Mallagh.

Shannon, stirred at last to take action, strode toward him.

Tony raised his head as he came up. His face was gray under the brown, worn and wretched; lines showed about his eyes and mouth. His whole appearance gave the impression of fear, fear that had left him without energy or strength of mind. Or so it seemed to Shannon.

"Tony," he said, and he spoke in a whisper so that no one might overhear. "What the devil are you doing here? Why aren't you looking after your men? Don't you know that they're under fire, and getting restless? What's wrong with you?" Shannon's anger flared up, white-hot. Only by an effort could he control his voice. "If you're a coward, for Heaven's sake don't let the men see it. Pull yourself together, man. Don't you understand what I'm saying?"

The words were strong, but no stronger than the case warranted. The time for sympathy had gone by. Only shame, the sense that others had guessed his secret, would drive Tony to do his duty. Better by far to lose a friend than that that friend should lose the respect not only of others but of himself. And if what he said had no effect, then nothing would. The case was hopeless.

Tony stood up slowly and gazed about him in a dazed way, as if he had not grasped the meaning of what was said to him.

"I've done nothing, have I?" he muttered.

"Nothing!" Shannon dug his heel into the soft moss covered with pine-needles. "That's just it. You've done nothing. We're going forward presently to take that village, and you've —— well got to set an example. *See!* If you're too scared to do what's right, how the blazes do you expect your men to?"

Tony understood. Shannon, poor, dense fool, thought that he shirked the fight. He, Tony Mallagh, afraid! He laughed. After seeing the house with the dead woman who had looked like Sybil! He was a soldier, fighting for his home, for the girl who was dearer to him than anything in the wide world.

"You don't think I'm afraid, do you, Shannon?" he said.

"Yes," said Shannon bluntly. "I do. And, man, think of Sybil. It's for her sake, Tony, as much as ours. How would she like to hear that when you were wanted you failed?"

Tony was smiling, his head slightly tilted on one side.

"So you think I'm afraid, do you? Good God! After what I saw yesterday. Why, man, all that I'm afraid of is that the Germans mayn't wait. That's all. And you think I'm a coward, do you? Why?" His eyes glinted with a curious anger. "Because of what I was fool enough to tell you?"

"Because of a good many things. Your looks to start with. I saw you looking like you are now, once before. I never told you, I never intended to tell you, but I must. You remember that morning when some of our fellows bolted and I picked you up with your head all cut? Tony, you were running then. If you'd only been trying to rally the men you'd have been back long before you got as far as all that. Understand! That's why I'm frightened now. Because you look the same as you did then."

"All right!" said Tony. "Sorry if I've made you think I'm worse than I am. I did run that time I know. Don't judge me, though, by what I was then. Maybe you think that I'm still a coward! I think—" here he laughed lightly—"I think that I'll prove you're wrong. And I'm going to prove it for Sybil's sake as much as my own."

"Well and good," said Shannon. "I'm glad to hear it."

"You remember the greengrocer's horse?" said Tony.

"Well! What's that got to do with it?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Tony. "Nothing."

Shannon turned and walked off, feeling dissatisfied and worried and for the moment not quite certain that he had taken the right course. He had angered Tony, he knew, and hurt him, yet he had no great hope that what he had said would awaken a sense of duty.

When he had gone some little distance he looked back. Tony was standing in the same attitude, head on one side, hands behind his back, staring after him.

AFTER the day's fight was over, the General in command of the division rode up and congratulated the South Irish Fusiliers, or what remained of them. They had achieved what in other wars would have been deemed the impossible. The sacrifice they had made had not been in vain. He was proud to remember, so he said, that he himself had served in their ranks.

And the remnants of the regiment, a bare two hundred and fifty men, ragged and war-worn and tired, stood to attention in the streets of a battered village and felt very proud of themselves and very hungry and very thirsty. As for what they had done, that was nothing. They had fought and driven the enemy before them, as they had promised always if the chance were given them.

If the General was surprised, they at least were not. Were they not the Royal South Irish Fusiliers—the Tipperary Tigers? In their hearts they pitied the Germans who had had to face their onslaught. Poor fools! Did they think they could withstand an Irish regiment with the bayonet?

In the last wild rush when they had been launched across open ground at the enemy's trenches, with their bayonets glinting in the yellow evening sunshine, the deep roar of their cheering swelling loud above the crackle of musketry carried a message both to friend and foe. The South Irish Fusiliers were charging. A savage exultant yell told that they had met the Germans and that the trench was theirs, and the regiments on either side, line after line, took up the shout and dashed forward to do their share.

"But," as the South Irish put it, "we was the fellas that showed thim the way. An' it was Misther Mallagh what made us do what we did!"

"Ah! An' what kind of madness was it that dhrove him on?"

"Himself knows! Did ye see him whin he came back and sthud with the bullets whistlin' all round him, as cool as ye plaze, an' axed if we was wishin' to live foriver an' was it a tay-parthy or a battle we wanted? A gran' young orf'cer an' no mistake!"

"Indade, an' ye sphake no more than the thruth. But it was not a tay-parthy a man wants more than wance in a lifetime. The cosht was a dale too high."

They had lost heavily from the very moment that the word had sent them forward out of the shelter of the wood toward the Germans. Their advance through the harvest fields and meadows and orchards had been stubbornly contested. They lost their colonel, shot through the lungs, a major, two captains and three subalterns. No more than six officers, unwounded, survived.

And always in the very forefront of the battle went Tony Mallagh, no longer carrying a sword, but a rifle and bayonet, fierce in attack, savagely intolerant of delay, stern, implacable, and disdainful of life.

Once, when the regiment had carried a village after fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the streets and houses, and the men of his company had swarmed around him, cheering wildly, he had glared at them with cold eyes and growled angrily, like some dog robbed of a bone. The stupor of battle which is worse than drunkeness held him in its grip. Did they know that they were wasting time or not? he had said. Were they tired of being soldiers, or what? Would they like their tea and cakes now, or would they wait till later when the table was laid and their bibs were ironed?

All these things and others were remembered of him after he had led the last charge.

Late in the afternoon the brigade crossed a stream in the face of heavy fire and went forward, driving the Germans before them through the trees.

The sun was setting by the time they had cleared the wood of its defenders.

A strange hush had fallen on the field of battle, a hush that was broken only by the incessant roar of the guns. Yet the men of the South Irish streaming onward, grimly silent, knew that the real struggle was still before them.

At the edge of the wood they found in front of them a stretch of open ground, sloping slightly upward, bare of all cover, and a fierce storm of bullets from the hedgerows and orchards and houses swept their ranks.

They fell back in disorder to the shelter of the trees. Urged to fresh effort by their officers, they poured in volley after volley, and started forward once more, only to waver and break and go back, leaving behind their dead. German marksmanship they despised, but this hell of fire from rifles and machine-guns was more than man born of woman could face and live. Or so they had thought. All that soldiers could do they

had done. They must wait for reinforcements.

But this time Tony Mallagh, bareheaded, grimed with sweat and dirt, but as cool and calm as on parade, smiling a little so men said later when they talked it over, did not retire with his company. He stood by himself, a mark for a half-score of machine-guns, perhaps more, and rifles without number, upright in the midst of the fallen.

The men had watched him, wondering when would come the bullet that would lay him low. Some had shouted for him to get back, that he would be killed, that they themselves could not shoot for fear of hitting him.

"Are you afraid, then, South Irish?" he had laughed. "Do you want German conscripts to boast that they licked you in fair fight? Are you so fond of your miserable carcases?" Here he had raised his hand to his face and they had seen the red smear of blood. Again he had laughed. "Good-by, then. I'd be ashamed to be seen dead in the company of a pack of —— cowards like you are! And you call yourself *Irish!* I'm proud to know that you'll not go where I'm going."

He turned with a little gesture of contempt and walked deliberately toward the enemy, rifle in hand.

A young subaltern shouted, "Don't let him go alone, South Irish!" Jumping to his feet he started after him but fell with a bullet through his heart. A dozen men followed.

ONE after another they dropped. And after that not even discipline, not even direct orders from their officers, would have held back the South Irish. Cowards, were they! They would prove that whatever they might be they were far from being cowards.

As they went forward with the wild, savage yell that gave warning far and wide of the coming of the bayonets, Tony Mallagh glanced back over his shoulder and laughed. Then he began to run.

Men fell by scores in the rush across the open; he was not touched. Neither machine-guns nor rifles brought him down. Bleeding from his wound he reached the German position well in advance of the nearest man. Using both the butt of his rifle and his bayonet, he fought his way into the trench. A swarm of gray-clad figures seemed to rise up and engulf him. And that was the last seen of Tony Mallagh for some time.

Like a wave breaking on a rock-bound shore, the South Irish burst through the enemy. Those that awaited their coming died. Those that fled they chased through the streets of the little village. A few escaped, but not many. It was a fight after their own hearts, a great and glorious fight. That the South Irish Fusiliers existed no longer save as a mere fragment of a battalion mattered not. No other troops could have done what they had done. They were proud of themselves, and justly.

Telford and a couple of wounded privates found Tony Mallagh under a pile of corpses in the orchard at the back of the trench.

"He's dead, poor fella!"

"Indade, an' he's not. Not yit, at laste. Mother of God! Luk at the wounds that he has."

Tony opened his eyes as Shannon came up through the trees. He dropped on to his knees by Tony's side.

"Tony, old man, are you badly hurt?"

"Hurt!" whispered Tony. "No."

He lay on the grass under the trees, his head in Telford's lap. And seeing him, there was no one present who did not know what the end must be.

"Take it aisy, sorr. There'll be a docthor along in a minute."

"Oh, Tony, Tony!" said Shannon bitterly.

"S'sh! What's that?" From their left came a deep roar of cheers.

"They're afther takin' another trinch," said Telford. "That 'ull be the Cumberlands."

"Shannon," said Tony, "I can't live, I know. I want to, and yet—yet somehow I don't. It was the house and the woman who was killed—remember! And the greengrocer's horse at Portsmouth." His mind seemed to be wandering.

"Not long now," muttered Telford. "Not very long, poor bhoy!"

For a while no one spoke. The cheering had died down. Only the sullen boom of the field-guns thudded on. The sun had set and the sky was a brilliant crimson over the hills. Another regiment was passing, rank after rank of dark figures against the bluish-gray of the trees. The dying man stirred uneasily, and Shannon bent nearer,

so that he might catch the least whisper.

"I wasn't afraid, Shannon, was I? I wasn't this time, at least. I was before, though."

"Afraid!" said Shannon. "I never saw anything so splendid in all my life. We wouldn't have won the trench but for you, Tony. We couldn't have."

"Something's fretting him," said Telford.

"Tony," said Shannon suddenly, "is there any message for—for Sybil?"

"Sybil!" said Tony. "Sybil!" He stared at Shannon with a look of doubt, almost as if the words he had heard held no meaning.

"Yes. Is there nothing I can do?" Surely he would be thinking of Sybil, thinking and wondering and worrying! Surely it would help him if he knew that any message he might give would reach her! "She'll be very proud of you, Tony," he said.

A wistful little smile crept into Tony's face.

"Don't you understand, Shannon, I'll be seeing her myself? I'll tell her—yes, I'll tell her everything. Good and bad, eh? She'll be glad, won't she?"

Shannon caught his breath sharply. Poor old Tony! He was going out at last then. Did he think, though, that he could live to see Sybil?

"He's wandherin' a thrifle," whispered Telford.

No one spoke. The end was very near. Then with an effort Tony tried to raise himself. A gleam of amusement showed in his tired eyes.

"Dirty work, fighting," he murmured. "Glad I didn't order a new kit, eh?" He closed his eyes.

The little group waited for a while in silence. Then Telford lowered the boy's head on to the grass.

"He's gone," he said. "An' but for him we wouldn't be where we are now."

"God help the girl!" said Shannon hoarsely. "It's hard on her. Awful hard! Poor old Tony!"

A subaltern with a bandaged face hurried toward them.

"Is Captain Shannon there?" he called.

"Well," said Shannon.

"The General's coming this way, sir, so I thought I'd tell you. You see, sir, Major Carne's wounded, and you're the senior surviving officer, and——"

"All right," said Shannon wearily. He stood up. "I won't be a minute."

One of the privates stooped down and gazed into Tony's face.

"Poor young fella! He was happy whin he wint wesht. Luk at the smile on him. Wud he belaive he was afther doin' all what he has done?"

"We've losht heavily this day, Pathrick," said another, "but there's none we cud have spared the liss than this wan."

"I wondher did they hear the banshee lasht night in Kerry. Himself comes from Kerry, I know."

Tony Mallagh was buried where he had fallen in the orchard. It was a starlit night. The guns had ceased. A cool wind blew from the north.

Sick at heart, Shannon turned from the grave. It would be very lonely without Tony Mallagh. Never before had he realized what Tony had been to him. Something had gone out of his life, something that could never be replaced. And then he remembered Sybil.

The thought of what the news of Tony's death would mean to her was like a knife-thrust in the heart. Had he done all in his power to keep the promise he had made? Had he tried to do his best to save her husband from running into danger? Had he not rather sent him to his death? Shannon pondered.

It had been no feeling of cowardice that had gripped Tony that morning, he knew, rather a dumb loathing of inaction. But supposing that it had been fear! Supposing that Tony had deserted his men in battle! Supposing that Sybil had heard! Would life have been worth living, for her, or for him?

WAR was glorious. War was great. And war was hell. But Tony Mallagh was dead, and Sybil must be told, and from him, Shannon, who would have given all he possessed to win her gratitude and thanks, must come the news.

He entered the little house in the village where he was to spend the night. The room still bore the marks of fighting. On the boards were dark stains. Bullet holes scarred the plaster of the walls. German rifles and helmets lay in one corner. A soldier servant was lighting a lamp.

Shannon seated himself at the table and searched in his pockets for pen and writing-tablet.

If he must write, it would be as well to

write while he had the chance. Tomorrow it might be his turn to die. Waiting would only postpone the agony. Then he wrote:

DEAR MRS. MALLAGH:

I am sitting in a little French cottage in a village which the South Irish have just carried at the point of the bayonet, writing a letter that will bring you the saddest news you have ever had.

Tony is dead. He died a glorious death. But for him we would never have taken the position.

And what else could he say? Shannon stared blindly at the white paper before him.

A subaltern came slowly toward the table.

"Lord! I'm done in."

Shannon looked at him.

"Tired, eh! You did well today, very well."

The boy's face flushed under the mask of dirt.

"Thank you, sir. But of course—we none of us did very much compared with poor old Tony. My hat! That was great. I never saw anything like it. He told me this morning early while we were in that wood that he didn't think he'd ever see another sunset. Said something seemed to tell him that he wasn't meant to live. And there was something about a house that he'd seen and a woman who was killed. I dunno', I think it had got on his nerves, and all he wanted to do was to kill Germans. Queer, wasn't it?"

"Don't understand. Don't understand at all," said Shannon. "And he died knowing his wife was at home waiting. He was all she had in the world—and now he's taken away from her. Rough luck on her though. It always is on the women—always."

"Poor old Tony!" said the boy. "I'll never forget, never, the way he walked off by himself, as cool as you please, and then laughed when he found we were coming after him."

The regimental Quartermaster, a stout, square-shouldered, round-faced little man, bustled in.

"Hullo, O'Brien," said Shannon; "where on earth have *you* come from?"

The little man was angry.

"Isn't it my luck at all? Another fight, the besht of the lot, an' me out of it, fooling about afther supplies. They're saying, though, that half the battalion's wiped out? Is that so?"

"Yes," Shannon nodded drearily. "We don't know for certain yet. The Colonel's gone. I'm the senior officer left."

The Quartermaster dropped into a chair.

"An' me out of it all. I'd have given a month's pay to be in it. An' ye charrged across open ground, did you, an' took their trench? Well, well!"

"We wouldn't have done it but for Tony Mallagh, though," said the subaltern.

"You don't say!" said the Quartermaster. And he listened with wide open eyes while the story was told. At its finish he brought his hand down with a crash on to the table. "God! That's the bravest thing that I ever heard tell of. Will they give him the Cross, do ye think? To his wife, I mean! He deserves it. An' me out of it all! It's a shame."

The little man's grief was very real.

Shannon turned once more to his writing.

"Oh! By the same token, I've some letters here which I brought with me." He took out a small packet. "There's one for Captain Shannon, two for—yes, yes, one for——"

"Any for me?" asked the subaltern quickly. "Two! Good biz!"

"An'," said the Quartermaster. "Here's wan that I have for Tony Mallagh himself. What had I better do with it? He passed it over to Shannon.

The handwriting seemed strangely familiar. Shannon frowned as he tried to remember where he had seen it before. Another letter, lying on the table caught his eye.

"It's the same as this, isn't it?" he said. "Why, good Lord! It's from Mrs. Carne. Did I tell you her husband was wounded? O'Brien, was there no letter for Tony from his wife—no other letter, at all?"

"Not so far as I'm aware," said the Quartermaster. "Nothin' more for the mess at all, save some parcels that are comin' on later."

Shannon felt as if a cold hand had touched his heart.

"I don't know," he said, "I don't know, but I don't like it." He paused. "Look here, I'm going to open this letter and see what it says. I'm writing to Mrs. Mallagh now, you see, and——"

He opened the envelope with clumsy fingers.

For a brief moment he could not see to read. The words were all blurred and uncertain. Then the mist cleared. And a sick horror came over him.

It was not a long letter; just a few lines that were to have brought grief and sadness and suffering, the greatest he would ever know, to Tony Mallagh. Sybil was dead. The illness had been short. Indeed, there had been no illness at all. She had said she was tired and had lain down on her bed to rest. Later, when they came to look for her, she was dead. So the Major's wife had written. She grieved more than she could say. She knew what it would mean to one so far away, yet she had thought it her duty to write.

The letter fell from Shannon's fingers on to the floor. He stared blindly across the room, seeing nothing, only the face of the girl whom he had loved, smiling tenderly, with her blue eyes full of sadness and pity.

He rested his head in his hands and tried to think.

Some one touched him on the shoulder. A voice spoke to him.

Why wouldn't they leave him alone? Couldn't they see that his heart was broken? Didn't they know that the girl—the sweetest and dearest girl in the world was dead?

And then something seemed to rise up and choke him. Sybil was dead, yes. But would that make any difference—to him? Why? She was Tony's wife, and nothing to him at all. Her husband was dead, and she was dead, and no one could wish things different from what they were. And Tony—Tony had said that he would see her soon, that there was no message. Why? Had he known just at the last, or what?

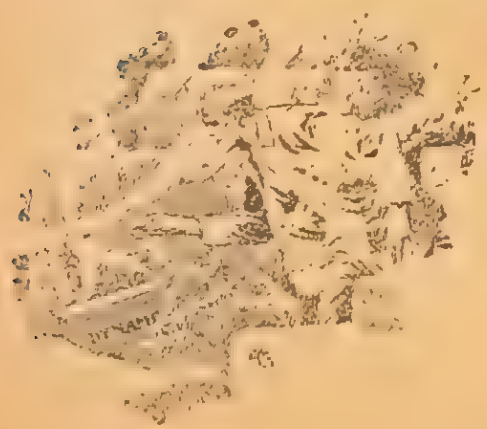
Shannon lowered his hands.

"Yes," he said huskily. "Yes, did you say anything?"

"Is it bad news you have in the letter?" asked the little Quartermaster. "You're lookin' ill."

"Bad!" said Shannon fiercely. "*Bad!* Good God, no! Why, it's the best news I've ever had in my life. Sybil—Tony Mallagh's wife is dead. You understand? She's dead. And I'm glad."

He rose to his feet and walked slowly out into the darkness.



AN OCCASIONAL HERO

by M. S. Wightman

IT MAY have been his unkempt appearance, or it may have been the slouch in his manner as he casually supervised the work of a gang of Filipino truckmen, perhaps it was a combination of the two which irritated White, the chief of the Lighthouse Service.

"Why do you hire such fellows?" he snapped, indicating with slight backward nod of his head the lanky American in dirty khaki.

Farley, the assistant purchasing agent, followed with his glance the direction of White's nod.

"Oh," he said, "partly because we need

them and partly because this Bureau is a sort of charity organization. That particular one, Cropsey, was wished on us by the Governor-General's office. He's an ex-soldier, and not a bad sort. He's been here for a couple of months and hasn't gotten drunk yet."

White's blue eyes glinted.

"They don't wish any of them off on me," he said. "I'll have no beach-combers on my pay-roll, and I indicated as much to Calvin when he sent his first one down. He hasn't tried it since."

They were young men, as are most workers in those tropical islands where at forty a man usually begins to show unmistakable signs of wearing out; and they both gave an impression of self-reliance and absorbing interest in their work. But here the resemblance ended. Farley radiated a good nature which would make allowances; White demanded of others the machine-like efficiency which characterized his own work.

"And that's the reason you hold us up now and then in our supplies," he said. "You can't do good work with cheap tools."

Farley's reply was interrupted by the arrival of a motor-car, the panels of whose doors were emblazoned with the eagle-topped shield of the Government. The two men hurried toward it; and a certain deference in their manner told that the genial-faced man who descended was the Governor-General.

As White started to leave, the Governor detained him with a hand on his shoulder.

"I have just dropped in to pay a friendly morning call," he said. "Come up with us."

The three mounted the stairs to the offices, leaving Cropsey the only white man on the lower floor of the long concrete building in which the Government houses its supplies.

He watched them go, a faint flicker of resentment in his manner. They represented success, prosperity, an abundance of the good things of life; he failure—a man who was hanging to its outskirts, as it were, by the slender thread of a five-peso-a-day job. Take that from him today; tomorrow he would be a beach-comber. For while with five pesos a day a man can live in some comfort in Manila, eating the lukewarm chow served by Ah Sing in his dingy restaurant and sleeping in a cane-bottomed bed in a musty room of one of the walled city's rambling stone houses, he can hardly lay by enough for his hospital bills when the inevitable sickness strikes him.

But if Cropsey's wage had been multiplied tenfold he would at the end of the month have had little more to show for it. He was one of those men born never to possess anything more substantial than a roving spirit. Putting money into his pockets was like pouring water into a barrel with a hole in its bottom.

But there was something more than resentment in his manner this morning. There was a vague uneasiness, brought about by his consciousness of having violated the rule of his Bureau which admitted of no exceptions; and his sin was returning to plague him. With the purpose of saving an extra trip to the powder magazine at San Juan, he had hidden in the building a small box of dynamite to be shipped that afternoon, together with some steel rods, to the engineers at work on the Calao bridge. The box lay in an out-of-the-way corner, behind some bales of Manila hemp and straw-filled packing-cases.

While White and Farley had been nosing about the building, he had been in terror lest they should discover his infraction, which he knew would mean his summary dismissal. With a sigh of relief he had watched them mount the stairs.

Now he started for the box, intending to get rid of it at once; but suddenly he checked himself. The Governor-General had gone up with them; he would be coming down at any moment, for the Governor did not pay protracted calls.

Cropsey scowled as he moved over to the part of the building furthest away from the hidden box. A dull rage burned in his heart. He had the inefficient man's contempt of rules. He felt that he had been trying to save the Government time and money, and instead of receiving thanks for his zeal, he was in danger of losing his place. A man who is used to getting only rebuffs from fortune, becomes quick to see his grievances. He told himself that hereafter he would do his work and no more, absolutely no more. He almost wished that the box would catch on fire and blow the building with its occupants to Kingdom Come.

It was not in answer to Cropsey's wish, but because a brown longshoreman, coming in from the pier, some forty yards from the end of the building, had not tossed away his lighted cigarette until after he had passed

through the opening near the hemp, that it began to smolder and a spark slowly to burn its way through the sacking to some of the loose straw which had fallen from the packing-cases.

The sound of the Governor's voice on the stairway caused Cropsey unconsciously to glance over his shoulder toward the hidden explosive. Tongues of flame were leaping upward from the cases, which crackled as merrily as a Christmas fire, and over the hemp bales a cloud of smoke was forming.

FOR an instant Cropsey gazed at the fire incredulously; and then, without a word, he began running through the building toward the blaze. His only feeling was one of resentment against the length of the unpartitioned floor.

Some one who had seen the fire at the same moment raised the cry. Almost abreast of Cropsey, Farley, followed by the Governor, raced to turn the water into the hose, while White hurried to the pier to summon the fire-launch.

With a sudden gasp, as the hot air filled his lungs, Cropsey hurled himself across the smoldering hemp bales; before him lay the deadly box; its sides were smoking. Stooping quickly, he lifted it in his arms, and began cautiously to make his way between the burning packing-cases.

The end of his solitary upper garment, a loose military coat, brushing against one of the cases, took fire. As the flame smote his skin, he staggered; but in an instant he had caught himself and moved forward with jerky steps, like a mechanical toy, to the sea now only a few paces distant.

Through his bloodshot eyes he caught sight of White running toward him down the roadway.

"Get back, you fool!" he shrieked in a high, sobbing voice.

Something in his tone checked White, whose legs, against the volition of his brain, moved him backward.

A moment more and Cropsey felt beneath his feet the rocks which formed the retaining-wall of the sea. Down them he staggered until the water came about his knees. Then carefully laying the box in a crevice of the rocks, he plunged head-foremost into the sea. The awful searing of his back ceased, but the salt water stung him cruelly.

White, hurrying forward to the man's assistance, saw as he clambered down the rocks the box which lay harmless enough beneath the quiet water; and his practised eye recognized it for what it was. But he did not pause.

"Here!" he said bending down and stretching out one hand while the other clung to a projecting ledge. "Take hold!"

Cropsey seized the hand and was drawn upward.

When they reached the roadway the blaze was out, and Filipino laborers were gingerly rolling the still smoking hemp bales across the concrete floor to the open air where a barefooted *tao* played a stream of water upon them.

The Governor and Farley, who had seen the incident without comprehending its meaning, met the pair as they approached the building. Cropsey stood facing them, hatless, begrimed and dirty; but no one realized that he had actually been on fire.

"Are you hurt?" inquired the Governor solicitously.

The feeling of resentment welled up in Cropsey intensified in its bitterness. His back was a live coal, his lungs a glowing bellows, and this man was asking him if he was hurt. He shook his head sullenly.

"Well, then, tell us why in the name of all that is reasonable you rushed headlong into that fire?"

To Cropsey the world had suddenly taken on the blur of a spinning top. He clenched his hands in his effort to maintain his footing; but still he did not answer.

"I'll tell you why," White cut in crisply. "To get a box of dynamite. Perhaps he will tell us what it was doing there."

The Governor's ruddy cheeks paled slightly and he drew a step nearer the foreman.

"You did that?" he asked, a new note of respect in his voice.

Cropsey made no reply. Instead, he fell forward limply, as his legs crumpled under him, into the Governor's arms which automatically opened to receive him.

Beneath his hands the Governor felt the man's bare skin.

"Get me my car quick, and here, Farley, you help me!" he shouted; and as, a moment later, the car shot forward with the unconscious man supported between them, he called to White, "Telephone them I am coming!"

As they raced through the level streets,

the Governor turned a puzzled look on the man resting against his shoulder.

"Where did you get him?" he asked Farley in a low voice.

And when Farley told him that the man had come with a note from Calvin asking that he be given work, the Governor made no comment but his arm closed more protectingly around Cropsey.

As usual, White did his work thoroughly. Everything was in readiness to receive and succor the stricken man.

The Governor waited until the surgeon had made his report, pacing noiselessly up and down the long corridor of the men's private ward, his head bent as if in thought. And if the white-capped nurses, who flitted quietly in and out of the rooms, were surprised to see the highest representative of the United States in all the East, awaiting news of one of her lowliest citizens, they gave no hint of it in their manner.

FOR days Cropsey lingered in that borderland which separates death from life; and at first it seemed impossible that he should not pass across it. But as is so often the case with those to whom life has the least value, he clung tenaciously to it. In the second week it became evident that he would get well, although he would have a long period of convalescence in the hospital.

It was during this period that the Governor dropped in to see him occasionally, making little friendly calls as a man does on his equal.

And during this period, a change seemed to come over Cropsey. It was as if the fire, passing through his system, had burned out the resentment which hitherto he had felt toward life. And with this change he realized the enormity of his offense.

Before, he had thought of the Governor-General with a vague feeling of contempt, as a man whom good luck had put into a position which he, Cropsey, could have filled much more ably had the same good luck put him in it. Now he realized that it was the Governor's strength and character which had raised him above his fellows, and the knowledge humbled him; he felt his own unworthiness.

He spoke of it one afternoon, haltingly, as he sat in a wheel-chair on the balcony outside his room, overlooking the green terraces studded with flowering shrubs which surrounded the hospital, trying inadequately to find words to express his humiliation.

The Governor listened without interruption until Cropsey had finished. Then placing his hand on the patient's knee, he said:

"Well, whatever mistakes you made you atoned for later. Suppose we call it quits all around."

And on his way out later, he stopped at the chief surgeon's office.

"Will Cropsey ever be good for anything again?" he asked.

"He will get over the effects of the fire all right, Governor," answered the surgeon. "The trouble with him is he has shot his constitution to pieces like so many of these fellows over here. I am treating him now for chronic malaria. That is what he will have to watch out for, the fever. But with light work and good food, in a place where he doesn't have to tax his strength too much, he ought to last a long time."

The next morning Calvin was instructed to keep his eyes open for such a billet as the surgeon had described.

Cropsey was able, with the aid of a cane, to walk about the hospital when Calvin reported that he had found a place for him—keeper of the lighthouse at Bago reef.

"Of course it is a place of great responsibility, sir, for all the ships from Hongkong and the north depend on that light," said the secretary. "But he would have a native assistant to do the heavy work. He would only have to see that the light was kept burning. Do you think you could trust him?"

The Governor hesitated for a moment, and then said as if thinking aloud:

"Yes, I believe we can. At any rate, I am going to chance it." A quizzical smile flashed over his face, and he added, "Do you know, I have an idea White won't be much pleased."

"I have the same idea, sir," Calvin laughed. "I think you will have to settle it with him yourself."

"It is a very important place, Governor," said White quietly when the Governor mentioned the matter to him.

"Yes, I know, but I believe he will measure up to it. He has received his baptism of fire, remember."

White lifted his level eyes to the Governor's.

"Of course, if you say put him on, I shall

do it, but you will make me break one rule I have always observed—never to hire a man with a slouch in him."

The Governor drew meditatively at his cigar.

"Slouch or no slouch, the man did something I confess I should not have had the courage to do—run for that dynamite instead of away from it."

"But if he hadn't put it there in the first place, he wouldn't have had to get it out. It took sand, I'll admit, but it was a sort of impulse, a flash in the pan. If it came to an emergency, like sticking to his post if anything happened to the light—of course I may be doing him an injustice—but honestly I don't believe he would do it. I distrust these fellows who think they know it all and won't live up to the rules."

The Governor rose and held out his hand.

"You put him on; I'll take the responsibility."

It was a part of White's code, once he had employed Cropsey, to treat him with absolute fairness. He might harbor a grudge against him personally, but he judged his work as impartially as if the ex-soldier had been his own selection.

And for a time the new keeper's unfamiliarity with the routine of his office tried White's patience. But he did not show it in the long, carefully worded letters he wrote Cropsey, minutely explaining the errors in his reports and asking for their correction.

Cropsey, on his sand spit, received these letters, several at a time when the weekly mail-boat put in at Bago, and a barefooted boatman in cotton drawers and a wide straw hat paddled out to the lighthouse with the mail. He spent hours poring over them, trying to fix each detail in his mind. But secretly they amused him. All this listing of tomatoes and bacon consumed, of gallons of oil burned, of the hours he spent at his work seemed so unnecessary.

The thing was so simple, merely to keep the light burning from evening until morning, at all hazards, no matter what happened, so that the steamers whose smoke from time to time curled upward for half an hour against the distant horizon, might shun the reef athwart, on which, for all the peacefulness of the blue water, lay destruction for any which might chance upon it.

And Cropsey was contented. He had found his niche; just to sit at the door of his bungalow, sweeping the sea with his glasses for passing ships and feeling that he was master of the squat tower on his left, and so responsible for their safety, gave him a sense of importance and of usefulness in the world. He came to know the regular boats and to speak of them to Fabian, his assistant, affectionately, almost as if they had been persons; but he did not envy those upon them their journeyings. He had found that the jostling of the crowd meant the multiplication of life's problems.

There were no white people in Bago, the village eight miles away at the head of the bay. Sometimes the villagers came over to the lighthouse, and in solemn procession climbed the winding stair to the light, where they stood silent while Cropsey proudly explained its mechanism. The presidente, a wrinkled little man with an olive face, who wore gaiters with elastic in their sides and a suit of dingy black clothes, always came with them. He seemed to have taken a great fancy to Cropsey, and always begged him to come to Bago and accept his hospitality.

Cropsey had been two months at the lighthouse before he paid his first visit to the village; but after that he went frequently, dining with the presidente and returning to his station before sunset. For on this point his instructions had been explicit—he must always be at his post when the light was burning.

It was this rule which led him to refuse the invitation of the presidente to attend the supper and *baile* in honor of the presidente's ninth child. The little man took the refusal to heart.

"Is it because I am a Filipino that you don't come, señor?" he asked.

"No, it is the light, señor presidente. I must be here when it is burning."

"But from my house, from the bay, you can always see the light. And Fabian will be here to watch it."

And when Cropsey still declined, the native's shoulders drooped.

"I had hoped you would be *padrino*," he said slowly.

"I will be *padrino*, even though I do not come," answered Cropsey.

But the man's disappointment troubled him as he returned to his house. He felt that the native would never understand why he declined to come; it would seem to him almost a betrayal of his friendship. As

the presidente had said, he would always be in sight of the lighthouse; nothing could happen in his absence. It was not as if it were the typhoon season when his return might be cut off by a storm.

The next morning he decided he would go. It would be the only time; he would make the presidente understand that.

As he got into his boat that evening, he felt vaguely depressed. He regretted his decision. He glanced upward over his shoulder at the light, which, with the precise movements of a clock, was flashing its warning through the gathering darkness; and impulsively he crossed to the tower and hastily climbed the stairs. Everything was in order; it looked as he had seen it look a thousand times before.

With a shamefaced laugh at his nervousness, he returned to his boat and set off for Bago.

But he did not stay long at the christening; his uneasiness came back. He was impatient to be again with the light which, as he walked down to the water, he saw flashing across the bay.

THE full moon which had risen enabled Cropsey to see his sand spit long before he reached it; and suddenly as he raised his eyes to glance again at the lighthouse, he paused, his dripping paddle held suspended in the air. In the protected waters back of the reef a small steamer rode at anchor. For a time he could not place the ship; none stopped at that anchorage, except—then it came to him. The steamer was the lighthouse tender *Butuan*, on which Inspector Morissey traveled. He had come while the keeper was absent from his post.

Feverishly he returned to his paddling, his gasps of effort drowning the gurgle of the water as it fell away from the prow of his boat. One hope sustained him: perhaps the inspector had not gone ashore that night. It was long past midnight; the steamer might have just arrived.

But as he neared his sand spit, he saw a launch drawn up on the shore.

He finished his journey slowly. This, then, was the end. He would lose his place, branded as untrustworthy; and with this record and his burned-out body, he would not find another. No, he would drop into that crowd of derelicts for whom even the problem of making a living had proved insoluble, shuffling through what remained to him of life an outcast and a pariah. And the Governor would learn that he had betrayed his trust; he only hoped that he would never again be called on to meet those friendly gray eyes.

He looked down at the water. A slight shifting of position, a moment's struggle and then oblivion. The ripples where the water broke over his hand on the paddle were soft and its warmth pleasant to the skin. It would close over him caressingly.

But something stirred in Cropsey, some feeling, some instinct, which had caused him that other time to run for the dynamite. With a dogged sweep of his paddle, he drove his *banca* ashore beside the launch.

Morissey was reading beside a small wicker table, over which an unshaded lamp threw a glaring light. He glanced up as Cropsey entered, but although he had never seen the keeper before, he neither rose nor introduced himself.

"I hope you had a pleasant evening," he said, drawing the corners of his straight lips down into a mocking smile.

Cropsey's heart sank. He read no mercy in the hard face before him.

"You're Inspector Morissey, I suppose," he replied, shuffling across the room to a chair on the other side of the table.

"Yes. I hope my visit hasn't inconvenienced you."

"My absence doesn't seem to have inconvenienced you much," flared back the keeper, stung by the other's insolence.

"Your absence," returned Morissey imperturbably. "I was coming to that. I suppose you can explain it."

Cropsey's anger cooled as quickly as it had risen.

"There ain't no excuse, if you mean business took me. I just went over for a minute to a christening at the presidente's. I was *padrino* to his baby; he seemed to think it was unfriendly when I said I wouldn't go. Everything was all right. It's a fine night, and I could see the light every minute I was away."

"Well," said Morissey, rising and stretching himself with a yawn, "you'll have a chance to put it in writing in the morning, and I'll give it to the chief. Maybe he can see the connection between baptizing a baby and running a lighthouse. I confess I can't."

He moved over to the doorway, but on its threshold he paused.

"You might send a letter along to the Governor-General at the same time. I understand he is a friend of yours." There was open mockery in his tone.

Cropsey sprang to his feet and rushed toward the inspector, his eyes blazing.

"You leave the Governor out of this. Do you hear? I ain't asking favors. I guess I can take my medicine—you just leave him out!"

Morissey stepped backward before this unexpected outburst. For a moment he stared at Cropsey incredulously.

"Do you mean you are not going to put up a whine to the Governor?" he asked in a changed tone.

"Yes. What's he got to do with it?"

Without replying, Morissey paced two or three times up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent in thought. Now and then he shot a curious look at Cropsey who was leaning against the door-jamb, his glance resting on the floor. At length he approached the keeper.

"Look here," he said, "I shall have to report your absence, but I will tell White it was the first time—I talked with Fabian before you came—and everything seems to be in capital shape. I will mention that, too. You write out whatever you want to say. Make it as strong as you can." He hesitated as he saw the look in Cropsey's eyes. "Don't count too much on it. White is strong for keeping on the job. Maybe he will let you off this time, but frankly I doubt it. Good night!"

Cropsey limply shook the outstretched hand, and without comment dragged his tired body to the lighthouse. The staccato explosions of the engine in Morissey's launch sounded like pistol-shots in his brain, as he sank wearily on the steps.

TWO weeks later Morissey finished his cruise and reported to White in Manila.

"That's a queer specimen you have down there," he said, as White looked up from the papers in Cropsey's case. "He ought to have whined, but he didn't; and when I taunted him with his pull with the Governor, he nearly murdered me. If you fire him, honestly, I don't believe he will put up a howl."

White laid the papers carefully on the table and swung his chair around, so that through the open window his glance rested on the blue waters of the bay and the distant slope of Mariveles rising behind them. Morissey's report had caused him a distinct feeling of regret.

In the months that Cropsey had been at Bago, White's feeling toward him had changed. It had gradually been borne in upon him that the keeper was taking pride in his work and was honestly trying to carry out his duties; and if a man is sincere in his work, the work is apt to take care of itself. The irregularities in his reports had grown less and less frequent. White had come to feel that Bago was no longer one of his problems. To dismiss Cropsey would be to open it again.

But the invariable punishment for absence from duty was dismissal. He told himself he would have to let the keeper go, but he also told himself there was no hurry—the matter could rest until tomorrow. He turned briskly and rose from his chair.

"Come on," he said, "let's go up to the club and have a bite of lunch. There are one or two points I want to clear up before I take action."

"I don't think he would do it again," said the inspector, stretching himself lazily.

"Oh, I suppose we will have to let him out," White answered indifferently, as they started for the door.

Morissey smiled, but made no comment.

The papers were still lying on White's desk when the inspector entered the next morning.

"Do you know," said the chief, "I have been trying to find a man for that Bago place, and to save my soul I can't think of one I would be willing to trust with it. Confound that fellow! He has put us in a hole."

"Why not let Cropsey stay on for a time?" ventured Morissey, turning to the window to conceal his grin.

White tapped the edge of his desk with a pencil.

"But that—" The strident noise of his telephone-bell interrupted him. "Yes, this is White!"

Morissey, watching the face of his chief, knew from its growing tenseness that he was receiving news of importance. He caught the words, "Bago—Cropsey—cholera, you say! Yes, I'll go at once! Thank you."

White snapped the receiver on its hook and sprang to his feet.

"Can the *Butuan* put to sea in an hour, Bob?" he asked.

"Yes, something the matter with Cropsey?"

"I don't know. That was the Executive Secretary. He had a wire from the presidente at Bago. Said they have had cholera at the lighthouse, and Cropsey needs help. The message wasn't very clear. I'll get a doctor and meet you on board at noon."

The one thing which unfailingly strikes terror to the heart of the white man in the Philippines is Asiatic cholera. Its loathsomeness, the suddenness with which it strikes its victims, the flame-like rapidity with which it spreads, give it an air of mysteriousness which adds to its horror. What he eats, the very air he breathes seem charged with a subtle menace.

WHEN Cropsey, ten days after Morissey's departure, entered the *nipa* house on the other side of the tower, in which Fabian lived with his wife and two children, he had expected to find one of them ailing of a mild complaint. Fabian had said merely that the *niño* was sick, when he requested Cropsey to come.

But a glance at the gasping child and Cropsey had recognized the malady of which he had seen strong men die overnight. It had cholera.

The mother, round-eyed and passive, squatted on the floor behind the low bed. Behind her, beside a half-emptied rice-pot, stood the other child, its little stomach protruding like an inflated balloon from its short white shirt. It had eaten from the same vessel as its brother. Fabian entering after Cropsey, had paused near the door.

The eyes of all were fixed on the white man. In their trouble they had instinctively turned to him for assistance.

Cropsey gave some hurried instructions to the woman—in his heart he realized their inadequacy—and then, turning away, he beckoned to Fabian, who followed him across the sand spit to his bungalow. Here Cropsey wrote a hurried letter to White, telling him of the cholera and suggesting that he send a man to Bago to take charge of the light, in case his services should be needed.

"Here," he said to Fabian, "you take this to Bago and post it. Then you come back with Gonzales, the *medico*, quick. But be sure to post the letter—there's a boat tomorrow. And ask the presidente to come back with you; he can send a man to Taypay with a telegram."

The resentfulness, which since Morissey's visit Cropsey's face had worn, was gone. In the depths of his eyes one might have seen a vague look of terror; but his step, as he again entered Fabian's house, was resolute.

Fabian reached Bago as night was falling—in the bottom of the *banca* which a fishing-boat had picked up as it drifted aimlessly about the bay; and Cropsey's letter was in the pocket of his *camisa* when they buried him the next morning, without waiting for the presidente to return from a few days' visit to Taypay.

At about the same hour Cropsey and the woman were spading two narrow graves in the sand back of the lighthouse.

Through his glasses later he watched the mail-boat depart for Manila. In a week, he told himself, she would return with a man to relieve him, and he could get away. He would not wait for his dismissal. He was weary. He stretched his hand against a post to support himself, as a slight dizziness shook him.

He was alone when the mail-boat returned. He had difficulty in making out her lines. His sight was becoming blurred; he had to blink before he looked at objects. Three days and nights he had watched beside the woman, stealing away only to attend the light, and to snatch such food as he could find fit to eat without cooking. And then—of her house he had made her funeral pyre.

With the woman gone, his duties had become less exacting; but he found them more difficult to perform. The walk between his bungalow and the tower became a journey, which at last he ceased to make, living in the lighthouse and saving his strength for the torturing climb of the stairs.

He had long since ceased to wonder why Fabian had not come back with the presidente. Only one idea filled his mind—to keep the light burning until the white ship coming from the south turned in at Bago Bay.

Now that white ship was here. He watched her cut her way leisurely through the blue-gray waters to the distant village;

and then for hours he waited for the boat which would bring his relief.

When at last he realized that none was coming, he gave a mirthless laugh and sank down in the doorway of the tower, his head resting on its sill. They expected him to do the job alone; they refused to help him.

Here the presidente found him. He could make little of Cropsey's mutterings. He shook his head when he saw the burned house. There was an air of desolation about the place.

He took the keeper by the arm.

"Come with me, señor," he said.

But Cropsey shook him off with feeble curses, raving incoherently something about "being no quitter."

When the *Butuan*, under forced draft, rounded the point to the south, the sun was shining brightly; and White and Morissey, standing on the bridge, eagerly focussed their glasses on the lighthouse.

Presently an exclamation broke from Morissey.

"My God! The light's flashing!"

The presidente met them on the beach.

"The door is locked, señor," he said, "and all day yesterday the light burned."

White forced the door and ran hurriedly up the stairs; but something by the light drove him back.

As he passed to the fresh air outside, he met the doctor.

"I don't think you will be needed," he said.

Two hundred yards out across the rippling water, the *Butuan* rode at anchor. From her stern, snapping in the brisk breeze, flew the flag of his country.

For a full minute White gazed at it fixedly. Then, turning, he raised his glance to the light; and suddenly lifting his hat, he placed it against his breast, and bowed his head reverently.

HARD ROCK

by Julius Grinnell Furthmann

IT WAS at Sixty-Mile, on the edge of the Mojave, where the mountains met the desert; where Grant Brothers & McCann were pushing a hard-rock grade toward Reno for the California & Nevada Southwestern; where the sun was dropping down behind the hills, and the light it cast becoming softened and romantic; where, of a sudden, the great peaks shook.

Boom!

There was no wind; only this low, sullen roar came back over the hills.

Boom-m!

They were firing the evening round. Out on the grade, down in the tunnels, dynamite was finishing the day's work. Shot succeeded shot; the mountains flung back the echoes; the earth seemed to reel under the measured crash on crash. It was as if several batteries of big guns had suddenly gone into action.

In the deathly quiet that fell with the last of it, two men slowly mounted the rocky path that chipped its way up the steep wall of the cañon leading into the far side of camp. They were an oddly assorted pair. One was a squat, burly little man in corduroys, with a chest like a gorilla, extraordinarily long arms and a pug nose. The other was rather tall, of lank bulk every way; a young giant with short red hair, eyes packed away under heavy brows, and a great clean-shaven jaw that always looked cheerfully grim.

A stiff climb brought them to the path which, swinging around a bend, led to the little yellow commissary shack, and beyond that to the long, low-built wooden structure, hereafter known as the cook-house.

"Ha," said the little man, stopping short.

The other swung his head.

"What's the matter?"

"Look who's come to camp!"

A chuck-wagon had just pulled up in front of the commissary. The speaker indicated a big young man, taking his ease on the seat. The driver had jumped down and disappeared in the little company store.

The red-headed young man laughed, a hard, soundless laugh, through closed lips.

"Gunner Gallegher!" he said in a low voice.

At this moment the other looked up and saw them. He did not move, but just sat there looking down at them, his dark face lighting up with the grim, inquisitive expression that is so near smiling and yet so different in effect.

They walked over.

"Hello, Gunner," said the red-headed young man.

Gallegher nodded.

"Hi, Bonfire," said he, then jerked his head toward the other's companion. "Who's your friend?"

"Burns. Tom Burns. You remember him from the North Bank, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. He had the timber gang; that's right. Hi, Burns."

"Hello, Gallegher," the little timberman nodded back. "How's everything?"

"Pretty good. Made a short stake in the D. & R. G. tunnels out of Grand Junction. How's tricks, Bonfire?" added Gallegher, turning to the other.

"Fair enough," said Bonfire. "I'm day shifter over in South Thirty-Five."

"What's the pay?"

"Four dollars and cakes."

To the initiate the foregoing meant that Bonfire was day foreman in the tunnel known as South Thirty-Five and that his wages were four dollars a day and board.

"Humph; that's not so bad," observed Gallegher half to himself.

"Oh, I don't know. But jobs are scarce in this man's camp," muttered Bonfire. "I tell you, Gunner, they ain't hiring a soul these days. New orders or something from Los."

"That's what they told me down at the siding," Gallegher nodded. "But I'd heard that you'd come up this way, Bonfire, so I jacked up and came on."

"Well, I been looking for you," said Bonfire. "I been looking for you to show up for the last two weeks; I have, for a fact, Gunner. Got kind of restless, too, like; so any time you're ready now, there's a nice piece of ground up there back of the bunkhouse. How d'you feel?"

For reply Gallegher jumped down from the wagon-seat. He stood there, stretching his long arms and showing the depth and breadth of his big chest.

"I feel fine," said he. "Why?"

"I was just wondering. Thought you might be a little tired with your ride or something. Two days on that desert road ain't no fun. I know what it is myself," nodded Bonfire. "We could wait till to-morrow, you know."

Gallegher shook his head.

"Not for me. How about yourself?" he added a little anxiously.

"Oh, I'm all right. Put in a pretty big day underground; but I guess I'm good for a half hour of your fastest."

"It won't take that long," said Gunner Gallegher.

The other gave him a bleak stare.

"What d'you mean?" he muttered, advancing a step.

Gallegher faced him with a grin.

"Nothing," said he, and let his long arms swing free.

At this juncture the little timberman Burns stepped up, breaking a long, rather diffident, silence.

"Say, I don't want to be offensive," he began, "but what's the row?"

Gallegher turned his head.

"Nothing much," he said quietly. "Me and him's got some unfinished business, that's all. I thought you'd heard about it Burns. Why, less than three months ago Bonfire blew into Shoshone Gap and took me to the worst licking I ever had in my life——"

The little timberman nodded.

"I remember now," he said, grinning. "You had a job, and he fought you for it. Some of the boys were talking about it the other night. It ain't the first time either, is it?"

"What?"

"That you two have pulled this stunt?"

"Not by half. Been at it nearly two years now, off and on. But we ain't the only ones that do it. I know lots of lads who won't go to work any other way. It's an old game among short-stake men; and a good game, too, when two lads are feeling their silk and jobs are few and far between. It's been turn-and-turn-about with Bonfire and me so far. The last time he beat me and beat me good; beat me out of bunk and bindle and job. That's the hard-rock game. Winner take all, eh, Bonfire?"

The latter was unbuttoning his corduroy jacket.

"Something like that," he answered, pulling it off.

The little timberman Burns chuckled and grinned, casting an appraising glance from one to the other of the two big young men.

"Well," he said in a minute, "I wouldn't bet a nickel either way myself."

Five minutes later, stripped to the waist, Gunner Gallegher and Bonfire stood facing each other in a ring of shouting men. Plenty of daylight lingered; the purple mountain leaned against the vermillion sky; and in the blue, an immense height above, lolled an eagle, lazy of wing, in lordly indolence. The crowd stood twenty deep; a typical hard-rock crew—tall, barbaric-looking men in khaki and corduroy, careless of speech and gay at heart.

"Now, Gunner."

"Go in, Bonfire."

"I saw the Shoshone scrap."

"They fought two hours."

THE two men were well matched. One was as tall as the other, and as broad; and it would have been hard to say, if there was any advantage in weight, just where it fell. The two men sparred warily, moving after each other with the quiet ease of two huge cats. There is a certain beauty in strength, and then there is a certain ugliness; but that usually comes with age. These two men were beautifully young and strong, and their lithe white nakedness gleamed in the twilight.

"Time!" roared the men.

"No hurry," muttered Bonfire, and snapped in a light lead. It was a flashing dart of wrist and mitt, and the Gunner's lip streamed red as he recovered with a rush and a shower of sledge-hammer blows.

First blood set the crowd to yelling.

Bonfire ducked gamely. He had all he could do to save his head. There was no evading that avalanche of big-bodied bone and muscle. He stood his ground and took and gave smash for smash, though the play was not up to his fancy; for the Gunner's long game was to give and take, Bonfire's to hit and get away; but there was no help for it now. He caught Gallegher in full dash, and, playing for the body, drove home his left and right with a force that jerked forth a grunt with each blow.

Gallegher halted, grinning for more; and Bonfire stepped into a full swing that gave him a taste of his own salt blood; he saw red, and the rue. For another savage swing beat down his guard, and as he dived in for a hanging clinch to save himself, his jaw came full on the peak of a sidelong uppercut which started at the Gunner's right hip, the big fist traveling less than six inches, the shoulder nine.

It was a terrific bunt. Bonfire found himself on his knees watching a gay fanfare of lightning crazily filming his brain. Blood trickled from his nose and ears. He saw the Gunner dragging himself on all fours out of the hurly-burly of the yelling mob. For the body-English of the blow had carried him headlong over his man. Then, reeling to their feet, the two men went at it again.

Back and forth they footed it, struggling for holds. Twice Bonfire tore loose and, staggering the Gunner with a straight right and left, he clinched again. To and fro they clipped once more, with the crowd roaring for a break; but the two men paid no heed, and in the wrestling Gallegher began

to show who was the stronger man. Again and again he beat Bonfire to his knees, using the sheer weight of body and fist. It was terrible punishment; yet there must have been something of the Antæus in the man, for with each fall Bonfire seemed to gain fresh wind and new heart for the fray.

He began to come back to something like his old snap-shot form. He began to fight with his head and feet as well as his hands. Up to now he had given way and been clubbed down. The Gunner still rushed him fiercely, wildly; but now Bonfire moved like a wind-driven shadow, hitting hard and fast at every turn. He gave his adversary respect withal, cutting and slashing at long range, until the rushes began to fall short, grow more unsteady, more wild, which must be expected if you don't get your man; and then, taking his time, Bonfire began to cut the Gunner to pieces.

Thus the tide turned, and at last Gallegher halted, blinded, gasping. He spat, and a tooth lay on the ground. He stood still, glowering like a stricken bull; his breath came in great sobs; blow by blow, he was being worn down to the quick; then, on the verge of his stubborn relapse, surprisingly, as if drawing on the last ounce of his reserve energy, the Gunner made a snarling rush, slugging out with both fists.

Bonfire side-stepped neatly, parading some pretty foot-work. He ducked under a full right-swing, and driving left and right to the ribs, got away. Gallegher reeled under the savage impact, but turned and came back gamely; he rocked a little as he stood opposite his man, and his arms drooped as if he felt his fists to be an unutterable weight. His face showed terrible punishment. Every breath he drew seemed a great actuality. The man was smashed, all in at last.

"Finish him!" bellowed the crowd.

It was the beginning of the end, and the mob was not to be denied. Bonfire smiled. His eyes were quiet, even pensive; but his face was terrible—livid with the strange, almost unearthly russet pallor that follows the stormy pageant of red-headed men like a curse of God. A sudden hush fell on the crowd, which had drawn back a little, so the two men in the middle might have plenty room to make an end.

Bonfire took his time. The Gunner looked all in, and all that; but Bonfire knew his man. He had beaten him before, he had him beaten now; but Bonfire was not going to take any chances. Hard rock is hard rock. You may pierce it with sharp steel and break it with dynamite, but you can't kill it. It is smashed; at the same time it lives, ready to strike back. There are men like that. They work in hard rock.

Bonfire made no mistake. He crept around the motionless figure in the middle of the ring; he stalked it deliberately, coolly, confidently, like a big cat waiting for the moment to spring. One punch, just one, that was all he wanted.

Suddenly he sprang in. Whatever was passing in the Gunner's mind at this moment is not known, but he seemed barely able to raise his hands to meet the other's rush. He attempted a right swing, which Bonfire dropped his guard to sweep aside.

Then something happened which can not be explained. For, with his foeman once more within easy reach, weariness seemed to fall from Gallegher's shoulders like a blanket; he grinned with awful expression, and the rest was sharp work, grim and swift and terrible. His right swing was only a feint; now he sank it like a flash, and as he followed through with a quick, curious shifting of his feet, his left fist shot in over Bonfire's lowered guard. It struck directly over the heart—a two hundred and ten pound jolt—and Bonfire straightened up slowly, then fell forward like a stricken tree, face down in the soft white dust.

It was the end. Gallegher knew it; so did the crowd, by its silence. It was a full minute perhaps before the prostrate figure stirred; then, surprisingly, the man rolled over on his back and sat up, raising himself slowly upon his outspread arms. He looked around stupidly.

Gallegher broke the silence.

"Had enough?" he asked, standing over his man; Bonfire looked up, wetting his lips.

"No," he said in a minute. "No, I ain't done yet!" And he tried to get up on his feet.

He fell back on one knee, and then suddenly made it after a fashion, rocking and swaying in front of the Gunner like a drunken man.

"Good boy," said somebody in the crowd.

Bonfire staggered out and around the Gunner. He tried to lift his hands, but could not.

"Come on," he said thickly.

Gallegher hesitated no longer. He advanced a step, his fist rising at his side. Another blow would finish it; but the Gunner paused in full stride, his arm poising in mid-swing.

"WAIT a minute!"

A burly figure barred his way.

It all happened in the tick of the clock. The newcomer held up his hand. He was a powerful, wide-girthed fellow with a heavy, brutal face and a scowling brow, which, as his grin faded, matched a hard-set mouth. A respectful commotion rose at his back.

"What's the matter with you boys?" he growled.

Bonfire reeled weakly at his elbow.

"Get out of my way!" roared the Gunner.

The other laughed in his face. He spoke with authority.

"Wait a minute, there. What d'you want to do—kill the man?"

Gallegher breathed in once, hard.

"I would," he said, and once more Bonfire staggered out.

"Come on, Gunner," he begged. "I ain't done yet——"

The newcomer shouldered him off.

"There won't be any more scrapping tonight," he said, as if that settled it.

A low murmur bespoke the displeasure of the crowd.

As for the Gunner, he drew a whistling breath and batted an eye at Bonfire, and a strange thing happened. Both men turned and made for the other man, their arms swinging loose, murderously, like those in a common cause. The other stood his ground; he laughed, and at the sound Bonfire stopped and shook himself dazedly.

"Wait a second," he said, catching the Gunner's arm, "it's Jeff Call, the Walker!"

"You're a fine rock foreman!" sneered the walking-boss. "You're a fine guy, you are! Who's going to hole South Thirty-Five if you get put out?"

The question had at once the physical effect of oil and a barb. There was a low murmur of assent from the crowd. Bonfire winced.

"What are you butting in for?"

The walking-boss met the parry with a curse.

"What am I butting in for? Well, you can bet all your old shoes it wasn't because I was worrying about your hide! I'll tell you why—I ain't taking any chances. If South Thirty-Five is holed tomorrow it means a two thousand dollar bonus for the camp. Ain't that what we been working for day and night for the last month?"

The crowd was impressed.

"That's so," muttered a few.

The walking-boss saw his advantage and pursued it.

"Listen, boys. See if I ain't right! South Thirty-Five is in three thousand and four feet. The engineers told me this morning that the work in North Thirty-Five—on the other side of the hill—was only twenty-six foot away. Our grade and theirs is the like, and I've stopped their side of the work. Too dangerous. The day shot broke an even nine foot in the tunnel. I figure on the night shift doing the same, so with a little luck, Bonfire ought to hole her out tomorrow and grab the bonus!"

Bonfire smiled a wan smile.

"Oh, I'll hole her all right," he said proudly.

Instantly the walking-boss clinched his argument.

"Then what's the use of taking any chances? Bonfire knows the old girl like a book. If he gets licked today the Gunner gets his job. He may be a good man—I know he is—but we've got to think about our bonus. If they want to fight it out again let them wait till the shift comes off tomorrow afternoon. It's all the same to me then; what I'm thinking about is the bonus. The camp wants the money and the record. The Gunner can take a machine under Bonfire if he likes and share with the rest. What d'you say?"

The crowd was with him to a man.

"Fair enough," said Bonfire.

The Gunner gave a short nod.

"But say, Jeff Call," he addressed the walking-boss, "since you're such a good hand at fixing things, maybe you'd like to try a little of the same?"

"What d'you mean?"

"You know what I mean—when Bonfire and I get through. Winner take all," said the Gunner, looking sly, "bunk, and bindle, and job."

Some of the men laughed. The walking-boss gave a surprised curse, then scowled thoughtfully.

"I don't know, Gunner. I'll have to see. You and Bonfire better go and have a wash before supper. I like your nerve; I may give

you a chance if you put Bonfire away. I ain't had a good scrap since that set-to with Red Cobleigh up on the North Bank—nearly two years ago. I'll see, Gunner; I'll see about it."

"No hurry, Jeff," said the Gunner, looking at his knuckles.

Bonfire touched his arm.

"Come on, Gunner," he said. "Let's go and wash up."

Late that night the shift struck springs in the heading, so when Bonfire and the day shift came on the next morning the delayed shot was just being pulled. The denotations cracked forth from the portal of the tunnel with a certain deliberation, as from the mouth of a big gun.

The men of the night shift looked haggard and wan from their long vigil at the machines.

BONFIRE saw that the air-pumps were set to work, then entered the tunnel. The Gunner followed him without a word. Each carried a flaring stub of candle. Halfway in, creeping foot-high along the narrow muck-car track, an acrid yellow smoke met them; the ghost of the blast. They pressed on, coughing as this sub-floor of gas and smoke grew thick, wall-like, reducing the yellow flame of the candles to mere spots in the murk.

In the heading, however, they found the air clean and sweet, made so by the suck and drive of the two great tin air-pipes which hung against the left wall of the long drift. It sounded like a giant coughing and gagging.

A huge pile of broken stone, the product of the shot, confronted them, and back of it, gleaming, sheer, blank, rose the clean white breast of living rock. The two rockmen crouched on the towering pile, inspecting the grim work of steel, giant powder and flame.

"Fine white muck," said Bonfire, sifting some. "Clean and dry as a wisp. No more water, glory be!"

Then the men came in. Bonfire told them that a scant nine feet of white limestone lay between them and the big bonus. He drove the shovelers at the great pile of broken rock. They caught something of his own virile impatience. By and by, hauled by the little electric motor-engine, car after car of muck shot out to the dump. Even the Gunner condescended to put a hand to a shovel and speedily cleared a place against the breast of rock to set his big air-drill.

Then a muck-car loaded with sharp steel drills rolled into the heading. The nipper boy stood them in the rack and presently the narrow drift was filled with the brazen song and scream of steel biting into hard rock.

Candles stuck in broken ledges of the passage threw an unearthly yellow glare over all.

The drills were changed every three minutes. Within two hours the muck pile was a slender heap. Bonfire stood at the naked backs of his men, contentedly drinking in the din. The Gunner worked like a demon. He arrayed himself with steel and air which screamed and hissed and sang against the ugly face of the stubborn rock. Bonfire patted his streaming shoulder approvingly. The Gunner was setting a terrific pace for the rest of the men.

"Don't wear yourself out, Gunner," advised Bonfire, with a grin. "Remember you've got a little unfinished business for this afternoon."

"I'm remembering," returned the Gunner grimly. He grinned, but there was a keen, half-cruel look about the tight lips and impatient eyes.

At three o'clock the round was set down and loaded. It consisted of fourteen holes loaded with about three or four hundred pounds of dynamite. Each hole was capped with a primer and a fuse. Ten of the holes were three inches in diameter and eight feet deep in the rock. The four remaining holes were four inches in diameter and six feet deep.

These last four were bored diagonally into the rock about two feet above the ground. They required almost as heavy a load as the rest of the holes combined; they were called the lifters. The fuses of these loads were cut and timed so as to fire last, that each great shot might have a separate opportunity to heave up through its quarter of the rock, rending and tearing all.

It is the lifter that smashes hard rock into small fine bits. So, on occasion, would it smash a man.

The men stood back a little as Bonfire and the Gunner made ready to fire the round. Black lengths of fuse dangled over the white face of the rock like the tenacles of a huge devil-fish. The four top-holes were fired first; they ranged across the top

of the breast, about two feet from the roof. The first fuse, which was cut at nine feet, spat a wicked stream of fire over the Gunner's candle.

Instantly a curious commotion appeared among the men. They began a hoarse cry—

"Fire in the heading!"

It passed quickly from mouth to mouth, and echoed out and through the far, glimmering portal.

Each foot of fuse represented sixty seconds of time. When Bonfire and the Gunner set fire to the six breast-holes which lay across the middle of the rock, the first fuse in the top-hole measured less than six feet and spat fire and hissed like an angry snake. The lifters were fired last. Then, candle in hand, Bonfire drove his men toward the motor-engine waiting in the heading to carry them all to safety. Gallegher walked at his side.

The men clumsily piled into the depths of three empty muck-cars coupled to the motor-engine, while Bonfire and the Gunner climbed up on opposite sides of a fourth car, which was nearly full of broken rock bound for the dump.

"All aboard," said Bonfire, and the little train started with a jerk.

And, as they got under way, the Gunner leaned over his side of the car and said—

"Well, Bonfire, if——"

He never finished the sentence. For, even as he spoke, the loaded muck-car reeled under them and gave a sudden lurch. Bonfire sprang backwards to see the car heel and crash into the ditch on the Gunner's side.

THE Gunner himself disappeared. The motor-engine leapt ahead, carrying three cars and a snapped coupling. It stopped within five lengths, and some of the men came running back. The muck-car lay on its side in the ditch; and the Gunner, who had been pinned under it in some way, cried out suffocatedly.

Another cry answered him.

"Fire in the heading!"

And a small band of Mexican shovelers piled out of the cars and ran helter-skelter for the portal. Bonfire stood gazing down at the wrecked car, his men behind him.

"How are you fixed, Gunner!" he shouted.

The buried man's voice came back.

"Fine, lad. Kind of short of breath, account of this load of muck on my chest. But outside of that I guess I'm all together. You lads better go while you can——"

For answer Bonfire sprang into the ditch and tugged at the high side of the overturned muck-car with a futile, frantic grip. His torso muscles leashed and creaked under the unequal strain. His men went at it, too, on all sides of the car, but to no good. It was too much for them, and presently they all stood back gasping.

"Fire in the heading!"

The cry rang back from the narrow walls. A few of the men glanced at the blazing fuses in the heading and ran. The motorman asked Bonfire for orders.

"No hurry," said Bonfire coolly. "At that, I guess we ain't got time to unload this muck car."

The slender band of men who remained cast furtive looks in the direction of the sparking and hissing rock. A few whimpered for Bonfire to come on. But he shook them off.

"Go on with you," urged the buried man. "There ain't no use of you fellows sticking around. I'm just as good as dead. Go on, Bonfire, or the first thing you know she'll be licking all of you out along with me—d'you hear? Bonfire—Bonfire, lad—you haven't gone yet?"

"No," said Bonfire.

The men had shrunk back a little and left him standing there. Nothing seemed to move the man.

"No hurry," he muttered, glancing at a piece of iron rod he held in his right hand. It was about two feet long and spoon-shaped at one end; a miner's spoon, an implement used by rockmen for removing fuse and primer from a hole when a misfire or something is the matter.

"Come on, Bonfire," begged the men. "It won't do any good to stand here. You heard what the Gunner said. Look at the burning drift!"

Bonfire trimmed a stub of candle with his knife.

"Fire in the heading!" shrilled the relentless cry.

It fell to a piteous screech.

"Go on, then!" Bonfire roared of a sudden and the men fell back before the cold fire that was in his eyes.

"What are you going to do?" muttered one.

"Nothing," said Bonfire. "I'm going to stay and pull that load."

He swung around.

"Aw, say, Bonfire," growled the man under the muck car.

"Fire in the heading!"

The motor-engine roared out toward the portal as Bonfire turned and ran back into the sparking breast. A deathly quiet fell in the narrow drift. The dark was like doom. It was accentuated rather than disturbed by that ominous hiss and flash. Bonfire and the Gunner were alone with . . .

"Fire in the heading!"

At the portal the men of the day shift waited in characteristic attitudes. Many cursed. They named the powder and the rock horribly. Others rolled cigarettes. The Mexicans shrilled prayers for the dying until Burns, the little timberman, made out a few words of the gibberish and began a fusillade of sharp rock.

"Ain't you a fine bunch of grave diggers!" he roared. "Get out of this!"

Some of the men jumped up and ran toward camp, screaming the news along road and path.

"Fire in the heading!" moaned the siren on the hill.

"He can't make it," muttered Burns. "He's got less than four minutes to pull the whole load. There ain't a chance in the world for him to get down to those bloody lifters. And one of them, mind, will fire the whole round!"

Then, suddenly, there came a short, whip-like roar close at hand.

"One," counted the men mechanically.

BONFIRE'S first act on entering the drift had been to reach for a sputtering length of fuse which dangled from the top hole at the left. This fuse had been fired first. He pulled lightly. A shower of fine sand and a yellow stick of giant powder slid into his hand. He gnashed at the spark in the fuse with his knife. It flamed within three feet and a half from the primer.

Three and one-half minutes of life!

Bonfire worked swiftly with knife and hand, guttering fuse and primer. For light in that dark and narrow place he clenched the four-inch stub of candle between his strong white teeth. When he reached the four breast-holes, the first fuse read like a ticker.

One minute and thirty seconds!

Bonfire began to curse the living rock. And each red eye in that rugged face seemed to twinkle back with infinite mirth. It winked at him in a huge grin. Bonfire whimpered as he stabbed at the terrible eyes. Great rivulets of sweat ran down his cheeks. He could feel the hot stream dripping on his breast, welling under his armpits.

His curses broke out afresh. He personified everything. He had a profane name for the rock, for the powder, for the Gunner, for the men who waited at the portal. The very rock seemed possessed. It clutched and clung to the imp of death in its vitals like a mother to her child. When a primer and a fuse came readily to his hand he cursed it endearingly; and when it evaded him almost cunningly, he bellowed like an angry bull.

Mechanically, his motions were perfect. There was no faltering, no trick of the hand or eye wasted, and no wavering of heart. The man appeared to array himself against the grim breast of the rock with superb effrontry. Now he laughed and sang at intervals.

Then the first lifter! Less than a foot of fuse lay between his knife and the primer. He chuckled. Less than sixty seconds to death! He tore at the second lifter-hole, and the fuse, brittle and rotten with the flying spark, came away in his scorched and bleeding hands.

For an awful jiffy of terror he was minded to tear at the stubborn rock with his bare mitts. He dug furiously in the lifter-hole, reaching for the hidden primer with the miner's spoon. He nicked the spark without a glance. There was no time. The third lifter rose easily, and Bonfire laughed. His knife touched the brass primer on one side and the spark on the other. Less than fifteen ticks of the clock between him and . . .

One hole remained.

He squatted on the floor, driving the spoon warily against the wall of the hole, for the lightest touch would drop that hot spark into the primer.

Bonfire felt the spoon catch hold. A cold sweat broke and welled all over him. He raised the spoon carefully, so that its precious burden might not joggle, and then, as he nipped the protruding yellow stick with its stub of fuse, he knew that he held Death spitting in his hands.

He turned and threw it toward the portal with all his might. It hurtled through the air and fell a good fifty feet beyond where

the Gunner lay under the overturned muck-car.

Then he crumpled against the side of the rock, which received him on its huge white breast almost gently. He wondered at the sullen roar and the shock of air which flattened him out.

And when the men came upon him, a little later, he was lying face-down in a little pile of primers and fuse beside the stingless breast of rock. He breathed jerkily. With gentle hands they turned him over on his back. He seemed to grin at them, and the grotesque effect was heightened by a twisted stub of candle jauntily coked in the corner of his mouth like a cherished perfecto.

"Awfully tired," he said suddenly. Then he wandered a little. "That you, Gunner? No hurry; I'll be ready for you in a minute. Give me a smoke, somebody," he added, sitting up.

As they half carried him past the Mexicans shoveling muck from the car which still pinned the Gunner in the ditch, he stood free.

"Hello, Gunner?" he called.

"That you, Bonfire?"

"How d'you feel?"

"Pretty good. How's yourself?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Have you got anything broke, Gunner?"

"No; I don't think so." The buried man seemed to hesitate. "Say, lad," he began.

"What?"

"That was a grand piece of work you just put over. I'd liked to have done it myself."

"Oh, you would, eh?"

"You heard me. And say, let me tell you something, fellow. You wait till they get this load of muck off my chest. Then you look out for yourself!" The muffled voice broke off. Then, "D'you hear?"

Bonfire laughed a hard, soundless laugh through closed lips.

"Oh, I'll wait for you," he said.

That was all. Bonfire laughed again, and started back into the heading to look over the reloading of the day shot.

Hard rock is hard rock.

TWO days later an empty chuck-wagon returned to Sixty-Mile Siding. A big young man sat on the seat beside the driver. He dismounted as they pulled up in front of the little company offices. Inside he asked for the division engineer.

A young man in spectacles came up to the counter.

"What can I do for you?"

"I want a pass to Mojave. Been working up at Sixty-Mile."

Without further ceremony the engineer drew forward a book of blue railroad transportation. His fountain-pen paused.

"Name?"

The big young man turned his face, the sole attractions of which were a twisted nose, a spreading patch of purple under each eye, some caked mud and blood, and a swollen lip, to his questioner.

"Cobleigh. Bonfire Cobleigh," was his answer.

The engineer stared at him.

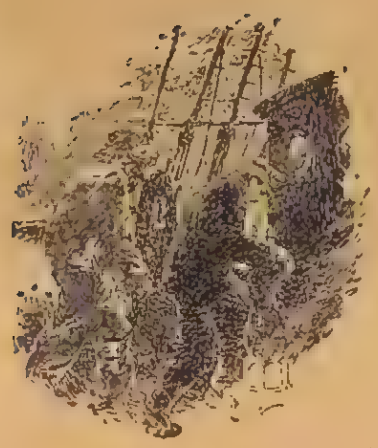
"Bonfire Cobleigh? Why, only the other day a big fellow was in here asking for you. I sent him up to Sixty-Mile. You must have met him——"

Bonfire nodded grimly.

"I met him, all right. And I wasn't the only one either. It might interest you to know that you've got a new walking-boss up there now. Take a slant at my face; it's a quince, but it ain't a marker to what the old Gunner handed to the Walker, Jeff Call, when he got through with me! He got my job, and then he got Jeff's—but say!"

Bonfire had his pass; now he paused in the door, flashing a rare bright look upon the bewildered young man in spectacles.

"If anybody comes in here asking for me, tell him which way I went, will you, kid?"



THE WHALER

A Complete Novelette

by

Frederick William Wallace

Author of "In the Bank Fog," "Winter Fishing," etc.

CHAPTER I

I AM LUCKY TO FIND A BERTH

IT IS with some little trepidation that I start in spinning this yarn, because I have an instinctive feeling that it will be ridiculed and curtly dismissed as being what old sailors would call "a twister." When a man has been kicked out of a Consul's office and designated as a "crazy shellback;" when he has been laughed at and called ugly names; when his most solemn oath has been the subject for incredulous jeers and his character as a sober citizen is doubted, he naturally becomes apprehensive in opening up afresh an affair which he has tried hard to forget.

My position at the present time is such that my connection with the affair would not redound to my credit, and I have no desire to lose caste by coming out under my own name and relating the circumstances as they actually happened. One man believes me, and it is with reluctance that I concede to his request and give to the world a secret which has rankled in my mind for many, many years. A sensitiveness to the shafts of ridicule has always been the weak point in my armor, but by employing fictitious names of persons and vessels concerned, I shield myself from being made a target for personal remarks of a derisive and satirical nature.

Somewhere or other I read of a man who related the story of his life to a party of friends. He was a jolly sort of fellow and his story was a heartrending one, but on its conclusion the audience were convulsed in laughter and refused to believe that his tale was true. I regard myself in the same light, and being an old sailor, my narrative, like that of the humorist, will probably be taken with a grain of salt. Go ahead, dear reader, and take it whatever way you like. I know it is real enough to me.

I was born and brought up in a little coast town in the Pine Tree State, and, like a good many Down-East youngsters, I broke away for sea at an early age. After two or three years' hard grinding in the mill of 'foremast experience I came out "ground and bolted," but my parents having died while I was learning to hand, reef and steer, I was left to work out my own traverse in life. After a bitter time in some hard craft, I gained a master's certificate in Liverpool. And when the Civil War broke out, I shipped as second mate aboard cotton ships running the blockade into Wilmington and Charleston. Though a Northerner in sympathy and by birth, I, with many others, was captured by a Federal cruiser and promptly "jugged." After two months' confinement, I escaped and lived very precariously for a lengthy period, and in November, 1866, was in New York—stranded.

The period of depression after the war had set in and business was bad in the United States then. Everybody was retrenching; money was scarce and employment was scarcer. The *Alabama* and Confederate privateers had practically destroyed the American merchant marine and, with

the stagnation in shipping which prevailed, starving sailormen loafed around the waterfront, sleeping in warehouses and living on the bounty of more fortunate shellbacks aboard the vessels. Every boarding-house on South and Water Streets was crammed with seafarers ready to sign away their liberty for a year without remuneration as long as they could fill a gnawing stomach.

Among this crowd of destitutes, I was one of the fortunate ones, having been taken in by Dennis Sullivan after spending a week or two "living in the street and boarding in the market." Sullivan, familiarly known to sailormen as "Hash" Sullivan, ran a boarding-house on Oliver Street, and a worse "sailor-robber" never drew breath. He was Irish and a "plug-ugly" for looks, and his cognomen came from the form of diet which was the *pièce de resistance* at his establishment.

WHEN I blew into Hash Sullivan's my whole worldly possessions consisted of my clothes and a sheath-knife. The clothes, for convenience and decency's sake, I carried on my back; they consisted of an old felt "bucko" hat, a woolen shirt, a pair of tar-stained dungaree pants, and a pair of "slipshods"—sea-boots with the uppers cut off. Socks I didn't have. The knife and sheath were supported around my waist by a strap which originally formed part of a horse's harness, but when Sullivan saw it, he promptly took it away from me, saying:

"Young fellow, I wouldn't wear that belt. There is nawthin' looks so well on a sailor as a good smart rope-yarn."

So my clothes and knife were afterwards held together and supported by a piece of marline, and my belt went to fit out some other poor devil outward bound.

I lived a good three or four weeks at Sullivan's, and during the whole of that time I scoured the docks looking for a ship. Masters and mates I interviewed by the score. Some civilly declined my services, while others, tired of being importuned by the hosts of desperate sailormen thronging the wharves, kicked me off their decks with curses and bitter oaths. It was a miserable time; cold receptions and cold weather for a half-clad man, and I think if I had remained ashore any longer than I did, I would have thrown myself off the dock and ended my misery.

I considered myself unusually fortunate when the master of an English ship bound for Australia came along to the boarding-house and picked me out to make up his crew. Though I was a qualified navigator and holding a "lime-juice" ticket for competency as master mariner, I was only too glad to stick my fist on the articles of the ship *Magician* as an able seamen at twenty-five dollars a month and two months' advance. My fifty dollars was to be paid after the ship had sailed, and Mr. Sullivan took the note "in payment for board, lodging and outfit," giving me a dollar to "blow" myself with before I went aboard.

The dollar provided a few schooners of beer for my less fortunate companions at the boarding-house, and with a dirty canvas bag containing my outfit—a sackful of straw known as a "donkey's breakfast," shirt and pants made of "dog's wool and oakum," a nondescript blanket and a pair of second-hand sea-boots—I, with the others, was escorted aboard the ship by Sullivan's roughneck runners and taken in hand by the mate.

A towboat hauled us down the harbor and into the Bay. We were turned to rigging out the jibboom, setting up the headgear, and straightening out the rigger's snarls. Two days later, we hauled out to the Scotland Lightship and made sail, and if ever a crew of shellbacks chantyed up topsail halyards lustily, it was the *Magician's* crowd.

I was something of a chantyman myself, and I felt so good at smelling salt water again and feeling a ship's deck under my feet that I sang and chorused for the sheer joy of being outward bound. By the aid of muscles and "Whisky Johnny," "We're All Bound to Go!" "Blow the Man Down," and "Santa Anna Won the Day," we mast-headed the yards and sheeted home until we had all the muslin flying and braces strung, and the big Australiaman was punching along with the lee froth bubbling in the scuppers and licking over the topgallant rail.

CHAPTER II

I HAVE A FALLING OUT

WHEN a man has been "on the beach" for a long spell, he appreciates being at sea again. New York and starvation seemed like a bad dream, and I was looking

forward to a good time on the *Magician*. Her skipper seemed a very fine sort of man, and the mates were as good as sailors will allow mates to be. The grub was "lime-juicer style"—not much of a variety, but it was of good qaulity and the bread barge was always filled without question. Plenty of biscuit meant plenty of those favorite sea dishes, cracker hash and dandyfunk.

The voyage also would be a lengthy one—New York to Melbourne, *via* the Cape, and Melbourne to England by way of the Horn—and though I was serving in a subordinate capacity, yet I was glad to do it and happy in the thought that I had shelter and food for a year at least.

With a roaring westerly blowing over the quarter, we stood away to the east'ard on the old deepwaterman's track to pick up the northeast trades for a shoot across the Line, and I can remember, after my trick at the wheel, how delighted I was with the ship's running qualities and the easy manner in which she steered. This is quite an important thing on an Australian voyage, where over four thousand miles of easting is run with square yards and a heavy sea. Sailors have no use for a vessel that is likely to prove a "terror" when running the easting down.

We dropped the land astern that morning. During the day the wind held strong and we sailed "at the rate of knots" with a main-skysail set. Towards nightfall the wind hauled southerly with fog. When I came on watch at four next morning, the ship was pitching and rolling in a lumpish sea, while fog shrouded everything. The wind was coming away squally, and when our starbowlines mustered aft, the second mate passed the word, "In royals and flying jib!"

We manned the royal gear and clewed up the sails, and while some of the watch went aloft to furl, I and two others went for'ard on the fo'c's'le head to tackle the flying jib. The fog was very thick—so thick that it was impossible to see the flying jibboom from the cathead. I can remember, after we had slacked away on the halyards and manned the downhaul, the second mate coming for'ard and singing out to the three of us:

"Come aft here, some of you, when you git that jib down. Git the horn for'ard—it's gittin' thicker'n pea soup."

I gave my two mates a nudge.

"Run along," I said. "I can muzzle that pocket handkerchief all right."

And while they made their way aft, I clambered over the bows and out to where the flying jib was bellying and slatting around in the breeze.

We carried one of those old-fashioned sky-raking bowsprits protruding very far out over the water, and by the time I reached the flying jibboom footropes, the vessel was blotted out in the thickness of the vapor, while the horn came through the veil in a pitifully feeble drone. As I listened to the roar of the bow wave beneath and the scarce-heard wail of the horn, and saw the dim halo of our lights, I thought it would be just the kind of morning for a bad collision. The notion made me shiver and look around apprehensively, but the slatting jib gave me little time for thoughts of that nature. Clambering up the stay I was busily engaged in stamping the hanks down with my sea-booted feet.

Humming a little song to myself, I was passing the stops, when the wail of a fog-horn came to my ears. I listened intently, thinking at first that it was our own. As I paused in my work, with nerves astrain, a wall of misty whiteness came sweeping out of the murk on our starboard. While I yelled in excited fright, the luminous bulk took the shape of the headsails and double topsails of a large ship crossing our bows!

THINGS happened with frightful suddenness. While I hung to the rolled-up canvas of the flying jib with skin tingling and hair raised in alarm, the other vessel stormed past and I thought she was going clear until I saw myself looking down over her deck and felt the tip of the boom strike the stranger's mizzen rigging. As soon as I felt the shock, I jumped and landed with a thump into the bottom of a quarter-boat outslung on davits, and while I was picking myself up there was a crash, a volley of shouts and curses, and then both vessels must have gone clear.

My legs seemed paralyzed, and I fancied for a moment that I had broken my back when I struck the thwarts of the boat. But in a few seconds the numbness departed, and I became conscious of a hoarse voice shouting:

"Fetch a lantern here, some o' you! That blasted Dutchman has stove th' whole quarter in—Th' bloody bumpkin's gone. Braces adrift. Look alive!"

A lantern was brought, casting a halo of

yellow in the mist, and a voice came booming:

"How's that boat? Is she stove? Thought I h'ard somethin' fallin' into it. Look an' see."

Now I was fully conscious of everything that was happening below me, but I made no attempt to rise out of the boat. I don't know why. Probably I had not recovered from the shock. Anyway, I lay across the thwart until a man's head appeared over the gunwale and I was revealed in the light of the lantern he held.

"Sink me!" he shouted. "Here's a man a lyin' in here——"

"Is he dead?" boomed the commanding voice below.

"Are ye dead, shipmate?" questioned the man in all seriousness, flashing the lamp over me.

"No," I managed to answer. "Just shook up a bit, that's all. I'll tumble out if you'll give me a hand."

And I crawled painfully over the gunwale and, stepping down on deck, found myself in the midst of a mob of men. One of them, a great, black-bearded fellow, grasped the lantern and held it up in front of my face.

"Waal, an' where did you spring from?" he asked harshly.

"Fell off the jibboom of that other vessel," I replied.

"Oh, ye did, did ye?"

The man's tone was vindictive and nasty.

"Where in the blazes were yer eyes? Couldn't ye hear us? What vessel was that anyway? One o' yer Cape Horners out t' trim th' *Flyin' Cloud*, eh?"

"No, sir," I answered respectfully. "She was an English ship—the *Magician* bound from New York to Melbourne——"

"Huh! Bloody lime juicer! Might ha' known it. Starvation an' ease, an' watch on deck snoozin' in th' lee o' somethin' 'stead o' keepin' a good lookout."

Grumbling to himself he laid the lantern on deck.

"An' who told ye t' come aboard here?" he continued. "What d'ye think we're goin' t' do with ye?"

"I'll turn to," I answered.

"Ye'll turn to, will ye?" he snapped. "An' what d'ye think we're runnin'—a blasted sailor's home for every calashee scrub that flops aboard? This is a whaler, not a packet ship. Have you ever gone whalin'?"

I replied in the negative. A whaler! A dirty, oily "spouter," outward bound, most likely, on one of their two and three year voyages! Whaleships! A merchant sailor's horror. He watched me with his savage eyes glinting in the light of the lamp.

"Kin ye swim?" he inquired threateningly.

"Yes, sir," I replied, wondering at the man's peculiar aggressiveness.

"Waal, I cal'late ye'd better start in an' do it," he growled menacingly. "Over th' rail ye go now, or I'll help ye."

"What?" I cried in horrified consternation. "Good Heavens, sir, you don't mean that!"

There was no mistaking his words when he advanced toward me with his shoulders hunched and arms outstretched. The men who had been working at the port braces knocked off to look on. As the great brute advanced, I whipped out my knife.

"Sheer off!" I snarled. "I don't know whether you're joking or not, but, by th' hook block, I'll give you a fight if you're looking for one."

He stopped short on seeing the knife in my hand.

"Trundle that out of his fist!" he cried to the assembled men. "Give him a toss. We don't want him aboard here."

A rough-looking fellow picked a capstan bar out of the rack and came towards me with the weapon upraised for a blow. I backed to the taffrail with my left arm over my head and the knife grasped tightly in my right fist; with wits working and eyes roaming for a chance of escape from the murderous intent of the whaler's crew.

It was unheard of; a ghastly nightmare, and momentarily I expected to awake and find it all a bad dream. I can remember the savage faces illuminated in the foggy glare from the lantern, and in their countenances not a revelation of pity or horror was shown. The black-bearded man was staring at me with a sinister, wolfish look in his eyes, and the man advancing with the bar seemed to be imbued with a certain joy of combat, a lustful, brutal expression in his face and figure which made me make up my mind to rush in and drive my knife into his heart.

THEN, of a sudden, the man paused and lowered his weapon.

"Why, sink me! I believe it's Jack Dixon, what was second mate o' th' *Bahama Belle*——"

"Eh?" snapped the man of the beard.

On the mention of my old blockade runner's name, I recognized the man who had identified me as Joe Smith, one of her crew who had escaped prison some time before I did and, clutching at a straw, I lowered my knife.

"Aye, right you are, Joe," I said. "And I'm thinking this is a poor reception for an old shipmate."

Joe turned and spoke to the other.

"He's all right, Cap'en. He's an old shipmate o' mine—second mate o' th' *Bahama Belle* runnin' th' Yankee lines between New Providence an' Charleston. Good fellow——"

The Whaler Captain made a gesture.

"Come here, you! Put up your dirk. We were only jokin'."

Thinking it was a particularly callous and bloody-minded joke, I slipped the knife into the sheath and stepped gingerly forward.

"Kin ye navigate?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

The skipper turned to Joe.

"Kin he?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the man. "He's a navigator all right."

"I hold a British Board of Trade certificate of competency as master," I volunteered.

"Then, by Judas, you're th' man we want!" cried the whaling skipper, bringing his heavy hand down on my shoulder. "Lord Harry! But I thought ye were nawthin' more nor less than some poor devil of a foremast hand! An' ye kin navigate, eh? Take sextant sights by th' sun, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and by the moon and stars as well."

I hastened to add my accomplishments:

"Time sights, double altitudes and lunars for chronometer ratings—I've had practise with them all, and if you have instruments——"

"We have them," he interrupted. "Come down below, sir."

And he led the way into the cabin.

CHAPTER III

THE WHALER AND HER CREW

WHEN I was precipitated upon the whaling vessel in the manner described, I calculated that we were to the south'ard of Nantucket Shoals. The whaler had fitted out in New Bedford and had stood to the south'ard for an offing after clearing Buzzard's Bay. Coming about, she was running to the east'ard when she crossed the *Magician's* bows and narrowly escaped being cut in half. So the black-bearded man told me as he lit the cabin lamp, and I knew then that I was on an outward bound "spouter."

"I'm th' master o' this vessel," he said, as he motioned me to be seated on the cushioned transom. "My name's Silvera—Captain Rodriquez Silvera, an' this vessel's the whalin' bark *Arcturus*, bound on a southern sperm-whale cruise. I'm no navigator, 'cept by dead reckonin', an' my first officer, who was supposed to do th' navigatin', has gone an' died on me. Came aboard in Noo Bedford full as a tick, took to his bunk, an' croaked this mornin'. You'll come in nice an' handy to take his place, an' I reckon you won't kick, eh?"

"I won't kick, Captain."

"Not even for a long whalin' cruise?"

"No, sir," I replied, "but I'm no whaleman——"

"Ye don't need t' be," he answered. "All as we'll ask ye t' do 'ull be t' navigate th' vessel t' where we want her t' go. Ye don't have nawthin' t' do with th' whalin' part of it. Navigate an' that's all. I'll give ye fifty dollars a month, an' ye kin live aft here.

"Ye kin take that gaudy first mate's room an' his gear as soon as we git him cleared out— Wait a minute. I'll have him cleared out now so's ye kin take aholt an' start right in."

He arose and clambered up the companionway steps, and I could hear him calling to the watch on deck. When he came below again, four ragged-looking, unkempt ruffians followed him.

"Git that stiff outa his bunk an' heave him over th' rail——"

"Sew him up, sir?" inquired one of the men.

"Heave him over, I said," snapped Captain Silvera sharply. "I've got no canvas to waste on that beach-comber. Ye kin lash somethin' to his heels as a sinker—No, blast him, jest shove him over as he is. Go ahead, now!"

And while I remained seated, mute with surprise and shocked at such callous words, the men entered the mate's room and

unceremoniously lugged the dead body of a man out of the berth and up on deck. I could hear their feet shuffling along the planks overhead; heard the barking, "One! Two! Three! An' heave!" as they swung their burden, and then the sullen splash as the body struck the water. Captain Silvera's harsh voice roused me from the terror of my thoughts at this unfeeling piece of desecration.

"Your room's ready for ye, *Mister* Dixon, but afore ye turn in, I'd like ye t' fix up our course. I want t' shape for th' Western Islands. Here's th' chart, dividers, rulers an' pencil."

I gave him the course in a few seconds, and he shouted it up the open companionway to the deck officer.

THUS, within twenty-four hours I was metamorphosed from Jack Dixon, A. B., on the merchant ship *Magician* to Mister Dixon, navigating officer on the whaling bark *Arcturus*. I had changed my flag from the "blood and guts" of old England to the stars and stripes of the United States.

I had twice been in danger of losing my life—I had no doubt whatever that Captain Silvera would have given me a swim had not Joe Smith recognized me and mentioned the fact that I was a navigator—and here I was, logged for a lengthy voyage, with exceedingly doubtful company, a brute of a Portuguese Yankee for skipper, and in a trade which I, as a merchant sailor, detested with the hereditary hatred of the bluewater shellback. However, I was in no position to choose. I had benefited by the change which luck had hove me into, but a nameless dread gripped my heart whenever I thought of the incident of the early morning, and I shivered involuntarily as I stepped into the berth assigned to me.

Scratching a match, I found the bulkhead lamp and lit it, and by its feeble light I saw that the room was of the ordinary type, with bunk and drawers underneath, a washstand with a tumbler and water-bottle rack over it, a small table and a clothes locker. At the foot of the bunk was a bookshelf equipped with a brine-stained "Navigator," by Nathaniel Bowditch, a book of azimuth tables, "Nautical Almanac," directories and "Sailing Directions"; and a few shallow novels of the type affected by some officers completed the library. The bedclothes in the bunk were dirty and disarranged, and I had another shock when I saw that the pillow was stained with blood.

"Lord Harry!" I muttered apprehensively. "What kind of a packet have I blown aboard of?"

Silvera opened the door at this juncture. He must have noticed me staring at the bloody pillow.

"I'll get th' stooard t' clear that dunnage away an' put fresh clothes in that bunk," he said as he entered. "You're wonderin' whar that mess came from, eh?"

And as I nodded dumbly he laughed.

"That come from his head. He was drunk when he come aboard in Noo Bedford an' fell down th' cabin gangway an' stove his thick skull. I cal'late that's what finished him."

Then, with an assumption of heartiness, he slapped me on the back.

"You don't want t' mind our little joke this mornin', Dixon. We whalers are rough an' ready but we don't mean no harm. Marchant ways ain't whaleship ways. Thar' ain't no brass an' gold lace aboard these craft, but you'll find things'll be all right ef ye do yer duty. Now I reckon ye'll find Lamson's rig-out 'ull about fit ye, so jest take 'em an' use 'em.

"Thar's a good kurnometer here—a noo one showin' Greenwich mean time an' rated one second slow daily. I've kep' it wound up while that joker was lyin' on his beam ends. I've got a sex'ant in my berth which I'll hand ye later. Git them lime-juicer's dungarees off ye an' come t' breakfast. It'll be ready in a few minutes."

Feeling a little more composed mentally, I changed my tarry rags for more respectable apparel, and sat down to breakfast with the queerest company of human beings it was ever my lot to be shipmates with. Two of the men were yellow-skinned Portuguese half-breeds from the Azores, named Fernandez and Francisco; the other two were Polynesians—one being, without doubt, the ugliest and most ferocious looking character I had ever seen. His cheeks were tattooed in bluish concentric rings while his huge white teeth were filed into saw-like points. When he smiled, the aspect of his countenance was frightful and repellent. All four were clad in colored flannel shirts, and they ate like wolves, boiled beef and coffee disappearing down their capacious mouths like coal into a furnace.

Having spent a good deal of time in the Southern States, I could be excused for wondering why four "blacks" were allowed to eat aft in the cabin. The skipper must have sensed my mental astonishment.

"Let me make ye acquainted with th' second an' fourth mates." Fernandez and Francisco nodded. "The other gents are Hilo Peter an' Tahiti Jack—our harpooneers."

The Polynesians grinned acknowledgment, Tahiti Jack looking a veritable ogre with his disfigured cheeks and serrated teeth.

I have seen some hard cases in my day, but that whaler's crew impressed me as being the most cut-throat looking crowd I ever clapped eyes on. Not a man but what had a scar or disfigurement of some sort on his person; all had a lurching hard-bitten appearance, while the language they used was vile enough for an Atlantic packet ship's fo'c's'le.

THE vessel seemed to me to be rather an unusual craft for the whaling business, by recollection of sundry Nantucketers and Vineyard Haven "spouters" I had seen at sea being vastly different from the *Arcturus* in almost every way. The orthodox South-Seaman was a square-sterned, apple-bowed type of windjammer; clumsy looking, with wretchedly cut sails, bowsprit steeved up like a mast, a housed-in poop, and no sail above topgallants.

The *Arcturus* had clipper lines and all the appearance of a clipper; her yards were very square, her masts lofty and with a rake aft, and the length of mast above her main royal induced me to believe that she once crossed a skysail yard. She was a clipper to sail as well. Silvera afterwards told me that she had beeen built for the "live ebony" trade—otherwise slaving—but when she had been put out of that business he and a few others had bought her and fitted her out for whaling.

Something of her appearance was spoiled by the ungainly whaleboat davits—three to starboard and one to port. Two spare boats lay bottom-up on the gallows aft, and amidships were placed the brick tryworks, with a huge pile of kindling-wood stacked around them. On top of the for'ard house was a great tarpaulined box which, I deduced, was a water tank.

I counted thirty men in our crew. They seem to have been composed of every nationality under the sun—Americans, Portuguese, Scotch, English, Polynesians, Scandinavians, and negroes; a rough-and-tough looking crowd, but all expert whalemen, filling the positions of harpooners, boat steerers, coopers, blacksmiths and seamen. So much for the *Arcturus* and her company.

CHAPTER IV

I DRINK WITH SILVERA

WE PICKED up the northeast trades after sighting Gran Canaria, and in sunshine, under blue skies and over bluer water, we ambled lazily on our aimless course. At night we hove to in order to cover the whaling grounds in daylight.

Silvera remained as agreeable as ever, but the man seemed to be utterly heartless, though I can not say he was severe in handling the crew; in fact he permitted liberties which would not have been tolerated for an instant upon merchant ships. He was pleasant to talk to and a good conversationalist, but I cannot remember in any of his discourses with me a single sentence which revealed a trace of sympathetic utterance.

He was an atheist and a man who scorned emotion of any sort, and from the amount of knowledge he seemed to possess regarding the Congo and Bonny Rivers, Benin and the Dahomey coast, I surmised that he had been a slaver captain or officer at some time in his life. Men who can calmly "jettison" their living cargo into a shark-infested sea when pursued by a cruiser, have case-hardened their hearts against any appeal to feeling and compassion.

Looking over the notes from which I am compiling this narrative, I find but a daily sequence of entries for the next two weeks:

"Fine weather. Wind N. E., fresh. Vessel under all plain sail running to s'thard. People employed on gear. No fish sighted. Lat. by obs. —— Long. —— Log. —— Bar. ——. So ends this day."

At night we brought to the wind.

According to my instructions from Silvera, we gave the Cape Verde Islands a wide berth and stood well over to the eastward of the thirtieth meridian.

"A good whalin' ground," explained the skipper. "Then we'll go to the Brazil bank."

But luck seemed to have deserted us on reaching our objective point, and though the mast lookouts were manned all day, not a single hail of "There she blows!" was sounded.

As we were right in the track of the homeward-bound ships from Australia and the Cape bound for the British Channel, as well as the outward ships from American ports, we saw many of them at a distance. With the desire for sighting and hailing passing vessels which is imbued in all deepwater sailormen, Silvera would always evince an interest in the Cape Horners flying past and endeavor to speak them. As homeward-bound deepwater clippers are in a hurry to get to port, none of them thought of backing the maintopsail to "gam" with a dirty "spouter."

"Too good a breeze hereabouts for those fellows, Captain," I remarked one day, after a big clipper with stuns'l out had ignored our signal. "We'll have to get down in the Variables for speaking ships. Up in the Trades they're all for cracking on."

"Aye, I reckon so," he answered. "I want t' git some stuff for th' medicine chest an' a little lime-juice. Don't want no scurvy t' break out now th' fresh meat an' vegetables are done."

THUS passed the lazy days. Tacking to windward for a day; lying to at nights, and running down the wind at times, we literally became an ocean loafer. Whales were conspicuous by their absence and I would have welcomed the sight of one as eagerly as the oldest whaleman aboard. I was becoming heartily tired of this *dolce far niente*, with nothing to do but squint at the sun and wind up a chronometer. There were no books aboard, save what I found in my own room, and to while away the time I read the trashy novels from cover to cover and even perused the dry Sailing Directories and the "Nautical Almanac."

I had thought of taking Silvera in hand and teaching him the use of sextant and chronometer, but on second thought I decided that the less he knew about navigation the better for me. That he knew nothing about the science was correct, as I was not long in finding out. Though it struck me as being rather an unusual thing for the master of a deep-sea vessel to be ignorant of navigation, yet it was by no means uncommon in certain trades. In the Pacific, I had known island trading vessels in command of masters who were not qualified as navigators, while many sealers have two captains—one as sailing master and the other a practical sealer and ice expert.

The skipper's penchant for chasing vessels was encouraged by me, as I hoped to beg some reading matter from the first craft that would wait for a boat from us. So, when I came on deck one morning and found us storming after a big full-rigged ship whose upper canvas was just lifting above the horizon to the east'ard, I was as eager as any one aboard to overhaul her. With royals mastheaded we brought the big ship broad on the bow before noon, and though she had lower and topmast stuns'ls out, we were overhauling her hand over fist.

"Have a squint at her," said Silvera, handing me the glass. "What d'ye think she is?"

"English ship," I answered, as soon as I looked at her. "Australiaman or a tea packet from China. She's a big lump of a vessel, but I think we could sail rings 'round her——"

"Waal, we'll have a closer look at her an' see ef we kin induce her stubborn lime-juice skipper to back his maintops'il for a spell. We'll go below an' have dinner now."

I had never known Silvera to be so pleasant before. He joked with the officers and Kanakas, and laughed heartily over my remark that "the homeward-bounders would think that the Flying Dutchman had shifted his cruising ground by the way we were chasing them all."

It was a pointless joke, but it evidently tickled his fancy immensely.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Flyin' Dutchman!" he guffawed. "Great—simply great, Dixon. We'll crack a bottle over that, by Godfrey! Stoo'ard! Fetch a bottle of rum here."

The liquor was brought. I filled my glass and drank to his good health. He had scarce put his lips to the tumbler before Francisco sung out down the companion-way:

"Better come on deck, Cap'en. Hagen is took bad with his stomach again——"

Silvera rose from his seat angrily.

"Cuss Hagen," he growled. "Why don't he die or git well——"

As he stepped up the companion he turned and spoke to me.

"You'll excuse me a minute, Dixon. Hagen is delirious again, I cal'late. Punish th' bottle. I'll be back in a minute."

The rum was particularly good, and I must have punished the bottle, although I have no recollection of drinking more than two three-finger nips. I remember the others getting up from the table and going on deck; then a feeling of intense drowsiness took possession of me and I staggered over to the transom and went to sleep.

CHAPTER V

I OVERHEAR SOME TALK

"HEY, thar! Rouse an' shine!"

I was shaken violently, and opened by eyes to find Captain Silvera leaning over me with his hand on my shoulder. There was a smile on his face.

"Waal, sink me!" he rumbled. "Ef you ain't th' primest hand for knockin' out a long calk, I don't know who is. Lord Harry, man, ye've been on yer beam ends for 'most two watches——"

"Funny thing," I muttered drowsily.

"What's funny?"

"My sleepin' like this. I'm no Seven Sleeper. Must have been that rum——"

"You jest bet it was," replied Silvera with a laugh. "Cripes, man, ye sat down an' finished th' whole bottle."

"The whole bottle? Why I only remember taking two nips——"

"Infernal big nips, Dixon. Reg'lar second mate's four-finger whacks, they must ha' bin. Come, turn out an' have some supper."

With all the feelings of a man recovering from a drinking bout, I rolled off the transom and soused my aching head in a basin of cold water. Then I staggered over to the table and sat down to the supper the steward had laid out for me. The skipper was in his room, but came out and helped himself to a slice of cold beef and a biscuit.

"Did you get anything from that limejuicer we were chasing?" I inquired sleepily.

"Beggar refused t' heave to," replied Silvera. "Her skipper told me t' go to thunder. Wasn't supplyin' Yankee spouters with medicines an' stores every time they hailed for them. Mean sorter swab he was, but I had th' laugh on him jest th' same."

"How's that?"

"Swiped two of his men away from him."

"What?" I ejaculated in surprise. "Swiped two of his men? How?"

"They jumped overboard when we ranged to wind'ard of him, an' before old bully th' Britisher c'd git a boat off th' chocks, I lowered an' scoffed them in front o' his eyes. He howled an' jumped 'round like a sperm bull in a flurry."

"Whatever made two members of a homeward-bounder's crew jump for a Yankee whaler?" I questioned doubtingly.

"They were in trouble with the after guard. Some fracas, I reckon, which they stood a chanst o' being jailed for in England. It's a great joke on Mr. Johnny Bull. Now, sir, when you've finished, I'd like ye t' shape a course for t' keep in th' track o' them Cape Horners. I must git medicines an' limejuice. Hagen is pretty sick an' some o' th' crowd for'ard are showin' signs o' scurvy."

I pushed my cup away from me and looked at him in some surprise.

"Why," I replied wonderingly, "we're right in the sailing track now. All the homeward-bound craft from the south'ard plan to cross the Line in twenty-three West or thereabouts. But what d'ye want to speak north-bound vessels for? Why don't you hail the outward-bounders?

"Why don't ye make for the Cape Verde Islands? You can get all the fresh vegetables, oranges, limes and fresh truck you want there, and it's only a couple of day's sail to the east'ard."

And I glanced at him with a vague distrust in my mind.

Silvera laughed.

"My dear Dixon, it's easy seen that you've never been skipper of a whalin' craft. As a marchant sailor it'll seem queer to you, but it's or'nary enough to us spouter men. We never git nawthin' from the outward-bounders. They have th' best part of their v'y'ge afore them an' consequently they keep a tight fist on their anti-scorbutics 'cause they never know how long they're agoin' t' be box-haulin' about in the Variables north an' south o' th' Line. Th' homeward craft have a port 'most over their bows when they get north o' twelve latitude an' ef they've got potatoes, limejuice, an' sich truck aboard, they'll give it freely 'cause they're 'most home. Y' see?"

"But why don't you make the Islands and do away with this chasing for to beg stores?"

"Now, thar's another thing 'bout whalers ye don't know, Dixon. I dursen't make a landfall in a place like Cape Verde, or some o' my bullies 'ull skip out. Some o' them are sick o' th' v'y'ge already, an' ef they thought St. Vincent was anywheres near, them Portygees aboard here 'ud swim ashore even ef we lay ten mile off. Now d'ye understand?"

I nodded, and with his plausible explanations my doubts fled.

"Well, Captain, just keep her about as we are and you'll raise all the Cape Horn fleet, besides the River Platers and the Indiamen."

NEXT morning I noticed the two strangers loafing around the fo'c's'le door with others of our crew. It was evident that they had fallen among friends by the manner in which the others hung around listening to every word they were saying. However, I did not pay much attention to them, though I could hardly credit any sailor leaping overboard from a homeward-bound Britisher and taking a chance of being picked up in a shark-infested sea by an American whaling bark. The fellows looked tough enough to have done anything up to murder, and there was a possibility that they had done as Captain Silvera had said.

During the day we raised the royals of a large American ship and we bore away until we had him close aboard. Silvera looked at the vessel through his binoculars for a long time and afterward I saw him conversing with one of the new additions to our crew. When he came aft he ordered the helmsman to come up and we braced the yards and swung away without speaking, merely dipping the ensign.

"What's the matter with him?" I inquired, pointing to the other ship.

"No good," answered the skipper. "That's th' *Lillian Cullen*. Master's an old shipmate o' mine an' I wouldn't ask him for a rope-yarn. He's a swab."

And he walked away.

"Humph," I said to myself. "You're infernally particular. Whalers' ways ain't merchant ways, that's a certainty. First vessel I was ever on that could afford to loaf around and pick and choose the craft she'll speak for a bit of stores."

Early next morning, another English ship was sighted and given chase to, and again our skipper declined to speak her after he had overhauled the vessel. When I asked him his reasons he lost his temper and told me to mind my own business. I did so, and retired to my bunk to think out a true bill for all these peculiar happenings.

As it was very hot below decks, I opened the small square port in the cabin trunk to let some air into my room, and while I laid ruminating and reflecting over the events of the previous weeks I overheard the skipper talking with one of the deserters from the English ship. The conversation was disjointed, but I listened in astonishment to the words.

"Ye say John was shippin' in Melb'u'n . . . th' next ship what had anythin'?"

The stranger answered:

"Aye . . . fortnight or so . . . pot o' stuff comin' down country . . . big Bendigo strike . . . Ballarat . . . "

"Any difficulty . . . signin' on?"

"None . . . eighty vessels when I left . . . crews cut an' run for diggin's. Skipper's payin' eight pounds a month for A. B.'s . . . easy."

"What . . . ship's name?"

"Yankee built clipper . . . three sky-s'lyarder . . . Britisher . . . named *Sea* . . . big ship . . . loaded . . . "

Then I heard my name mentioned by the stranger.

"Aye . . . curious beggar . . . Dixon . . . navigator . . . fell off jibboom, ye say?"

Silvera's growling voice replied and I strained my ears.

"Yes . . . hard job . . . hocused him . . . bottle . . . rum . . . knows nawthin'."

And they moved away.

"Hocused? Bottle of rum?" I muttered. "Humph! That's why I slept so hard. There's something mighty fishy aboard this packet." And I set my wits to work.

Why should I have been drugged? What happened to make Silvera remove me from the scene for a space? How comes he to be so familiar with a runaway sailor from an English ship? What had he to do with "John" who was "shipping in Melbourne?" What had the Yankee-built clipper *Sea*-Something-or-Other to do with a whaling bark or Silvera himself? Why should I be the subject of discussion between my skipper and a runaway stranger?

I asked myself these questions a hundred times and failed to find a possible solution. All morning I remained in my berth turning the problems over in my mind until my brain boiled, and when I went on deck to take a moon sight, I made a resolution to keep my weather eye lifting for squalls.

CHAPTER VI

THE *ARCTURUS* HAULS BY THE WIND

FOR several days the skipper never spoke to me. Then all at once he became affable and friendly, even making me a present of some of his favorite cigars. I felt he had something up his sleeve and I kept on my guard for new developments. We had been yarning away for a while when he inquired suddenly—

"Are you religious?"

"Religious?" I reiterated. "Well, that's a hard question to answer. I've got as much religion as most sailormen have a chance to get, but I'm no devil-dodger by any manner of means. I've lived pretty square though, and done my best for a shipmate——"

"Humph!"

He interrupted with a grunt and continued pacing the quarter.

"Did you ever kill a man?" was his next query.

"No," I replied decisively, "and I hope I never will."

"Ever been in th' live ebony trade? Ever been privateerin'?"

"No, sir," I answered. "But I've been blockade running."

He seemed to think very little of that and resumed his pacing.

"Looky here," he continued, pausing in his three steps and a turn. "Ef you got a chanst to make a pile of dollars easily would you be particular as to how ye got it? Especially ef nobody 'ud ever know or find out? A pile of dollars, mind—a fortune enough to 'low ye to retire an' live at ease for th' rest of yer days. Eh?"

"That altogether depends, Captain. I'm open to grab all I can get, but I'd like to know how it's to be done first."

"Say piracy—lootin' vessels," returned he, staring into my face with a steady gaze.

"Piracy?" I gasped. "Lord, man, but that's a terrible thing, and means the gallows if caught. Besides, it means murder——"

A fearful thought flashed into my mind, and he must have noticed the terror in my eyes.

"Pah, man!" he said with a half laugh. "You must think I'm a second Cap'en Kidd. I don't mean this throat-cuttin' business: black flag, walkin' planks an' that sorter guff. I hev a little bit o' a scheme for borryin' stores from them passin' vessels an' sellin' them down south in th' Falklands. Ye see, while we're cruisin' on these grounds we kin be askin' passin' vessels for barrels o' flour, pork, beef an' sich-like——"

He paused with a sheepish smile on his face, while I almost burst out laughing. What a mean, cadging schemer he was! And this was his piracy? Holy sailor! I had met stingy skippers in my day, but this whaleman had them all hull down. So this was his little game! This explained his chasing of ships! Begging for stores to sell on his own account!

"You can count me in, Captain," I answered heartily. "I don't mind if that's the game——"

"Sure! That's what I was a drivin' at, but I didn't know how ye'd look at the idea."

"*Caramba!* I don't care a hang. My conscience don't bother me on that score. We'll hail every ship in sight, and take all we can get."

He laughed pleasantly and walked away for'ard.

"What a game!" I ruminated, but as I turned his conversation over in my mind I began to think I was more of a fool than he was. What pile of dollars was to be made out of a few barrels of stores? Why should he ask me if I'd ever killed a man? I was beginning to get horribly tangled up in my thoughts, and as I was not particularly quick-witted, I judged I had better go below and in the privacy of my berth overhaul my experiences from the hour I was thrown aboard the *Arcturus*.

I went over events from the time I was threatened with a long swim, and then came the memory of the bottle of rum; chasing the English ship and the two supposed strangers who came aboard mysteriously while I laid in a drugged slumber; the disjointed conversation I had overheard, and now this farcical conversation with its preposterous and picayune suggestion. Silvera to make a "fortune" by such a petty scheme! Pah! It was unheard of!

WHILE I scratched my thick down-east head in perplexity, a hail from aloft came to my ears.

"Vessel down to loo'ard, sir!"

I rolled out and pulled on my boots.

"Must go and see Silvera cadging his stores," I muttered.

When I went on deck it was to see him and one of the deserters aloft in the hoops on the fore and main scanning the upper sails of a ship which gleamed like tiny pearls above the blue of the sea line. When he came down, he gave me a knowing wink and passed the usual order to bear down.

"We'll borry somethin' from this packet, I hope," he said softly. "Big ship—three skys'l-yarder."

I remained on deck for over an hour, until the other vessel hove her hull up above the horizon. She was a big ship, deep-laden, and carrying double topsails, single topgallants, royals, and skysails on each mast. There was a fresh breeze blowing and with all our own kites set and drawing, our little clipper bark sped rapidly through the water in the direction of the stranger.

It was about four in the afternoon when I went below to get a drink from the rack in the saloon. The skipper met me as I stepped down the ladder.

"Where are ye goin'?" he inquired.

"Just to get a drink of water," I replied.

"Oh," he muttered, and he stepped on deck as I went over to the table.

The steward was coming out of my room just as I lifted the water bottle from the rack and found it empty. He looked across at me quickly.

"Water, sir? You'll find some fresh from the tank in your room, sir. I'll fill that one in a minute."

He reached over for the bottle and I handed it to him.

Entering my room I closed the door.

"Now," I said to myself, "here's where I get my bearings. Steward is a liar, for he filled my water bottle this morning before I turned out."

I reached for the article and was just in time to see the last grains of a whitish powder effervescing into nothingness in the bottom.

"Just what I expected," thought I. "The rum bottle won't work twice, but the water bottle will. Humph!"

With a plan of action mapped out, I poured the water out into a tumbler and thence into the wash bucket. Then I threw myself down on my bunk and awaited developments.

I must have been lying some twenty minutes when I heard stealthy footsteps approach my door and some one tapped lightly.

"Mr. Dixon!"

It was the steward's voice. I shut my eyes and snored.

"Mr. Dixon!" came the voice again, and the door was quietly opened and the man entered the room. I had my back turned to him, but I could almost sense everything he did, even to picking up the tumbler and examining it. After bending over me he left the room and closed the door.

"So much for him," I murmured when he had departed. Glancing out of the square port above my bunk I could see the big skysail-yarder coming up to leeward. Fearing lest I should be seen staring through the small window I half drew the curtain and lay down again.

Once more heavy footsteps approached my door and a voice boomed.

"Dixon! Dixon!"

It was Silvera, but I made no answer. Then he looked in on me and I heard him say to the steward who was in the cabin:

"He's out of th' way for a long spell ef he drank a tumbler o' that water. Look in on him now an' again."

And the door was closed quietly.

THERE was a great deal of tramping overhead. I felt that all hands were out and preparing for something by the scurrying of booted feet which resounded on the deck above me. Silvera was at the poop rail, singing out orders.

"Check in weather braces! Square the yards . . . Git your engine set up, Cameron . . . Whalin' gear out o' boats . . . Stand by."

I glanced through my port, but could see nothing but a portion of the quarter rail and the empty sunlit sea.

"Now, Fernandez!" came the skipper's strident voice. "Got that Brazilian ens'n bent? Ease down yer helm. . . . Slack away weather, haul taut lee braces. . . . . Haul up on yer mains'l. . . . Haul up yer fores'l. . . . Smartly, men!"

"Hauling by the wind," I murmured.

As the bark heeled over with the pressure, I took another look through my port and saw the strange ship close aboard. She

was a big two-thousand-tonner at least, with built lowermasts and long spars.

"American built ship loaded with Australian wool for England," was my mental comment. What a magnificent picture she made with her snowy cotton duck canvas full and drawing, and her long black hull slipping through the blue water with a line of foam streaming aft from her beautiful clipper bow!

I could make out the officer walking the weather side of her long quarter; see the passengers she carried standing upon the coach-house staring at us; see, too, the crew's heads peering over the rail for'ard and a man in a red shirt sitting astride of the martingale stays under the bowsprit—evidently spearing dolphin, for he had a four-pronged grain in his hand. My attention was suddenly arrested by the actions of this fellow when he commenced waving his neckerchief in a peculiar manner. A voice sounded close above me.

"There's John, Cap'en. D'ye see him hangin' to th' martingale an' wavin'——"

Startled, I glanced at the clipper's name board on the quarter rail and read, *Sea King*.

"*Sea King* . . . Three skys'l-yarder . . . Melbourne . . . John?" I muttered, and I felt that something was going to happen which would materially clear the fogginess of my mind and elucidate the mystery of the whaling bark *Arcturus* and her peculiar skipper.

CHAPTER VII

I QUOTE FROM MY LOG

"WHAT ship is that?" came a faint hail from the clipper ship.

"Brazilian trainin' frigate *Arcturus!*" thundered Silvera.

"Brazilian frigate be blowed!" came from the other, and the voice continued:

"Sheer off now! D'ye want to run us down?"

The *Sea King's* lower sails were ashiver, owing to our stopping up the wind. As we were jammed up to windward, we could not bear away without coming down on the other ship, and I could hear the officers on the Australiaman cursing at us as they put their helm up to get clear of us.

"You confounded Yankee spouter!" bawled a little red-faced man shaking his fist at us. "What in blazes d'ye mean?"

I could hear Silvera laughing.

"Slap it into him, Cameron!" he cried. "Wheelhouse, mind!"

Bang! There came a detonation which caused the *Arcturus* to shake in every plank, and as I stared in consternation through the port, I saw the *Sea King's* wheelhouse literally swept from the deck in a crumple of splinters—wheel-gear, helmsman and the wooden house knocked clean over the lee quarter. Fascinated by the suddenness and horror of the action, I kept my gaze fixed on the now unmanageable clipper; heard the shouts of fear and rage which came from her people, and saw the panic-stricken crew running about on her decks. An officer ran to her break rail shouting:

"Haul aft your weather head sheets! Slack away lee braces——"

"Sweep th' quarter, Cameron!" roared Silvera excitedly. "Don't give 'em a chance to wear ship or they'll run away from us——"

Bang! Another explosion, and a wild yell from our crew as the shot smashed across the cabin trunk, tearing skylights, companionway, and chart-house into a shower of splinters and clearing the poop of all living creatures.

"Give 'em another, Cameron. Bring that mainm'st down ef you can. Look out for John."

John—the man in the red shirt—was still astride the martingale and safe enough if he stayed where he was.

Before the third shot was fired, I heard footsteps approaching my room, and I had just time to fall back on my blankets and commence snoring when some one looked in on me. The gun spoke again, but I controlled my nerves so that I made no movement.

"Dead to th' world," muttered the intruder, and the door was closed quietly. When I stared through the port once more, it was to see the clipper ship lazily drifting to leeward with yards aback and sails slatting. The third shot had torn a great gap in the bulwarks amidships, but the mainmast was still standing.

"Lower away yer boats!" commanded Silvera sharply. "Fernandez! Take charge and work down to loo'ard an' pick us up when we're ready."

I shall quote from my log as to what happened next, as I consider it requires no elaboration:

Four boats lowered. Six men in each. All armed with cutlases and firearms. Captain Silvera in leading boat. Two boats ranged to starboard and two to port of *Sea King*. Crew made fast to main chains and scrambled aboard, leaving one man in boat.

Whalemen went aft in company with man in red shirt. A show of resistance was made by *Sea King's* officers. Some shots fired and ship's people driven forward and locked in fo'c's'le.

Numerous boxes were fetched out of cabin and lowered carefully into boats. All boats returned within half an hour to our vessel. Man in red shirt coming off with Silvera.

Time, 6 P. M., January 21, 1867. Latitude, 14° 10' North. Longitude 31° 6' West. 780 miles east of Cape Verde.

IT WAS piracy—nothing more and nothing less. Horrified by the events I had witnessed, I laid back on my pillow, while the crew hoisted their boats and booty aboard. A number of men came down into the cabin and I was conscious that Silvera was among them. Snatches of their conversation fell upon my ears. Our villainous Portuguese Yankee skipper was giving orders.

"Yes! stow th' stuff in th' lazareet. . . . No! he's sure for another six hours yet. . . . Won't know anything. Easy now. Heavy, eh? . . . A great haul. . . . "

"Holy sailor, Cap, but I was afraid ye'd never show up," an unfamiliar voice was saying. "I've hardly slept a wink sence we crossed th' Line. You picked up Billy all right. . . . Good haul. Waal, I cal'late that'll finish us now, an' I'm cussed glad. What's yer plans for that joker t' windward? Soon be dark. . . . Better hurry."

The shuffling feet left the cabin and there was a scurrying about on deck. The *Sea King* was lying on our starboard side and I was unable to see her from my window.

"All right, Cameron," sung out the skipper. "Plant one amidships. Look sharp or it'll be dark."

The boom of the gun came to my ears, and I realized what the fiends were doing. They were sinking their victim!

I saw through everything now. As I lay with the clammy sweat breaking out on my face, the mysterious actions of the past two months unfolded themselves before my mental vision, and the scales fell from my eyes. Nineteenth-century pirates masquerading in the guise of whalers! It seemed impossible and improbable, but what else would account for the events and things I had seen and heard? The patrolling of the sailing tracks; the chasing of many ships upon trivial pretenses; the nature of our crew, and the skipper's peculiar conversations. Two vessels had been looted—I had no doubt whatever that the ship we chased when I was drugged had been despatched in a manner similar to the *Sea King*—and upon both ships were confederates who in some mysterious manner had means of communicating with Silvera.

How was it all arranged? Both ships were Australiamen homeward bound. The conversation of Silvera and the stranger came to mind:

"Bendigo," "Ballarat," "pot o' stuff coming' down country," he had said.

What stuff? It was as plain as a deadeye to me now. Bendigo and Ballarat, the new Victoria goldfields where everybody was flocking to. The "stuff," gold!

Bang! The gun spoke again, and changed the tenor of my thoughts. What would happen to me? It was a disturbing question, and I realized my helplessness. Could Silvera do without my services? I couldn't answer. It was a deuce of a position for a man to be in, but after a vast amount of brain-racking, I concluded that the less I pretended to know about what had happened the better for me. If Silvera thought that I suspected his game, I had absolutely no doubt but what I would be given a toss to the sharks. Men of Silvera's type had no compunctions. I knew that already.

My action after this may seem strange, but you must remember the state of mind I was in. I had been an eyewitness of an act of piracy on the high seas. I was among a crowd of suspicious cutthroats who wished me to know nothing; a ship and her human freight was being sunk alongside, and I was supposed to be oblivious to it all in a drugged slumber. To calm my nerves and add realism to my feigned sleep, I poured out a small drink from the water bottle and tossed it off. Within a minute I could feel the drug working its soporific influence. I had a faint recollection of hearing the boom of the gun again, and then I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VIII

I CARRY OUT A PLAN

I AWOKE naturally and saw that it was daylight. The steward was setting the breakfast on the cabin table, and feeling as if I had passed a nightmarish sleep, I

turned out, washed and went on deck. The steward looked sharply at me as I passed, but his "Good morning, sir!" was as civil as usual.

The skipper was pacing the trunk deck when I came up the companion, and he hailed me with a laugh.

"By th' great horse-block!" he cried. "Have ye really woke up? *Caramba!* I thought ye were in a trance by th' way ye snored. Th' second mate said he c'd hear ye up on deck here. Cripes, man, but you're a heavy sleeper."

I gave a sickly grin, and he stepped towards me.

"Run up ag'in' another hard case yesterday," he said softly. "That skys'l-yarder was another screw. Said he wanted me t' pay for all th' stuff I got, so I swung off. My scheme's no good, Dixon, so we'll get down to huntin' whale again. When ye've fixed up th' reck'nin' I'll ask ye t' drive her south. Thar ain't no fish hereabouts, so we'll make th' Pacific an' try th' Line grounds thar. South we go, an' ho, for th' stormy Horn!"

I placed our position and give the course for the Line. The bark had been lying to the wind all night with fore and main royals and topgallantsails furled, and when I gave Silvera the course, he sung out to the watch loafing for'ard:

"Swing th' mainyard! Make sail!"

To the second mate pacing to leeward he said:

"Get the muslin on her, Mr. Fernandez. We've a long stretch to make an' we don't want to be all year makin' it. Rouse out yer stu'n's'l gear. Get th' booms out an' set lower an' topm'st stu'n's'ls to port. Clew up th' maintack an' sheet everything well down. This little barky is goin' t' sail now!"

Among the men hurrying around to execute the orders I noticed the fellow in the red shirt; and helping to break out the booms and stu'n's'l yards lashed on top of the for'ard house was Hagen, the sick man, looking as fit as he ever was. Yet Silvera had said he was delirious and dying!

DURING the weeks which passed on our run to the south'ard, the skipper treated me with every courtesy, and I guarded my emotions so well that he never suspected for a moment that I was aware of the crimes which he and his crew had committed. Indeed, things were so monotonous and usual, that I began to doubt myself; the whole affair seemed but a vivid dream.

Though I hunted around for proofs to substantiate my suspicions, yet absolutely nothing could I find. No trace was there of any gun aboard, nor did I ever run across any weapons other than a shotgun in Silvera's room. I knew that the officers had revolvers—most officers have—but rifles, cutlases, cannon and shells were conspicuous by their absence.

As I was not an officer of the ship I had no right to go prying around the vessel, but on the occasional strolls I made to the fo'c'sle head I found nothing to characterize the *Arcturus* as being anything but what she was—a whaling bark bound on her lawful occasions with a perfect right to cruise wherever she listed in pursuit of the cetaceans. I might have got substantial proof if I could examine the lazaretto, yet I knew that any attempt on my part would mean sudden death. I did not try.

We passed the East Falklands after a fine run down, and we crossed Burdwood's Bank to edge up to the stormy corner of the southern world. The weather was fine for the high latitudes—fresh sou'westerly wind and a smooth sea—and with royals furled we swashed on our lonely way. I had been asleep all afternoon on the third day after passing the Falklands, and in my stocking feet I ascended the companion for a breath of fresh air. The night was black dark. Filling my pipe in the gangway, I stepped on deck intending to ask the watch officer for a match. As I passed along the lee alley towards the break rail, I heard my name mentioned by some one over to windward, and stopped to listen.

With the sough of the wind and the wash from our passage through the water, the conversationalists were obliged to speak loudly, and being to leeward I caught the words distinctly.

"Get him out o' th' way after we make the Island. . . . We don't want him after that. . . . Need good navigator to pick it up. . . . Afterwards I can take her to 'Frisco. . . . Think Dixon knows anything?"

It was Slocum's voice—he of the red shirt—and he was talking to Silvera.

"Nawthin' . . . Doped out both times. . . . *Albemarle* . . . *Sea King*. Get him to fetch us to Hiva Nuku. . . . Jake Thompson'll have his schooner there an'

we'll ship th' stuff. . . . Give his a toss to th' sharks. . . . "

FEARFUL of being discovered, I crept away with the hair of my head tingling. So that was the lay! I was to be used for my navigating abilities in picking up some Pacific Island rendezvous and then cast adrift like a worn-out swab. Red Shirt would navigate the bark to San Francisco—any one who could steer and keep track of a log could do that; but picking up some isolated Pacific atoll required more accurate knowledge.

Slipping quietly into my room, I lit my pipe and turned into my bunk to think things out. A number of schemes came to my mind, but I dismissed them all as improbable and impossible. I had no friends among the crew whom I could rely upon. All were deep in the scheme and none would act against Silvera. Joe Smith, my former shipmate of the blockade days, had never spoken a word to me since the eventful night I fell aboard the bark, and I knew I could expect nothing from him.

Escape was impossible. If I attempted to swim to a passing ship I would be shot or quickly recaptured, and the chances of swimming in the icy seas of the Southern Ocean were not feasible. I couldn't launch a boat without some one seeing or hearing me. I had to dismiss that. I had no weapons other than a sheath-knife, and even if I had a revolver, what could I do with it? Shoot Silvera and a few others, maybe, but it would not be long before I would be killed myself. No, I had to admit that my chances were mighty slim.

I reached down a chart of Cape Horn and the Straits of Magellan and studied it for a moment, and I remembered how, that very morning I had to explain to Silvera the great easterly variation which prevailed in the vicinity. He had questioned me with regard to the amount of westing in the course I had given him; in his ignorance he had reckoned when steering south, the course should necessarily be south, variation, deviation and other errors of the compass being a mystery to him.

It was the easterly variation which gave me the idea. Desperate and all as it was, I decided that it was the only thing I could do. If I were destined to die, then I would take good care that others went with me. Briefly, I determined that I would put the *Arcturus* ashore on one or other of the dangerous rocks which fringed the Horn!

I lay awake the best part of the night, smoking and thinking. At daylight I slipped into my pocket a steel watch chain I had found in the desk and went on deck. Francisco, the watch officer, was lolling over the break rail for'ard, and a stupid *Chileno* was at the wheel. Going over to the compass I told him to steer by the weather leach of the mainto'gallan's'l for a minute. Standing in front of him, I took off the binnacle hood, noted the point at the lubber mark on the compass, and after slipping the steel chain under the right side of the card I placed the cover on again.

"All right," I growled to the helmsman. "Keep her as she was."

And I left him pulling the spokes over to head up on the vast amount of westing I had introduced into the compass.

"Now!" I muttered. "I'll play a little game of my own, Captain Silvera, and we'll see who wins out—you or me. If I can't pile you up inside of twenty-four hours then I'm a Dutchman."

At noon I got a sight, and fixed our position as some eighty miles northwest of Staten Island. There was a fresh breeze blowing and we were logging seven to eight knots with a southerly wind. We were sailing close-hauled, heading about W. S. W. by correct compass course, but in reality the bark was actually making that course, as my steel chain more than compensated for the easterly variation.

"Now, sir," I said to the skipper, after I had shown him our position on the chart, "we'll be opening out the Horn by daylight and we're feeling the set of the South Drift now. Crack on and make the most of this breeze. We've plenty of sea room to clear Cape St. John and we want to make all the westing we can while the wind holds."

He nodded curtly. When he went on deck, I heard him singing out for the fore and main royals, topmast staysails and gaff-topsail to be set.

"Now," said I to myself, "slam away, you bloody-minded pirate! Four bells in the first watch'll have us trying to push Staten Island out of the water and a grand lee shore the cliffs will make with this souther blowing. There are no lights in this part of the world and there's sure to be fog inshore, and it's a safe bet that no

lookout will ever report land until the breakers are heard."

THE afternoon seemed interminably long, and as it was Summertime down south, the night came tardily over the waste of rolling gray sea and grayer sky. I paced the quarter, smoking, until nine o'clock. Looking over the log slate in the chart-house, I made a mental calculation of our position as being about fifteen miles off the land. The breeze still held strong and the vessel was storming steadily on the course I had laid for her. Within two hours she would strike.

I glanced around the ship, heard the growling talk of the watch mustered aft in the lee of the half deck, smoking and yarning; heard a ribald chorus come from the fo'c's'le, and saw Fernandez steadily pacing the weather alley. Silvera was below asleep. The harpooners were playing cards in the half deck. A shivering negro tugged with mittened hands at the spokes of the wheel.

All were oblivious to impending disaster. But they deserved the fate I had in store for them, and when I felt my nerve wavering, I thought of the murdered crews of the *Albemarle* and *Sea King*. Aye! I could save my sympathy.

I went below and locked myself in my room. Sitting on the transom I made a mental overhaul of my life, and, finding the slate fairly clean, waited calmly for the crash which meant the end.

CHAPTER IX

SILVERA AND I ARE QUITS

THE reader of this narrative will probably think I was extremely phlegmatic in my desperate actions. I was. Life held very little for me then. I had no home and no relations, no friends except an odd shipmate here and there. I held a master's certificate, but hard times and hard experiences had practically killed all my ambition, and I hated the life I was living; hated the sea; hated everything. Existence for me had by now developed into a mere prolongation of life by eating and drinking. Scheming and planning had jaded my brain, and I was quite prepared to die if I could be sure of blotting out the horde of scoundrels I was shipmates with. God would give me credit for that, I was sure.

Therefore it was with an easy conscience that I waited for the inevitable, and without any nervousness I turned into my bunk. When the bark struck, I would remain where I was. Just as easy to die below decks as to be engulfed and tossed about in the open.

I must have fallen into an apathetic doze, for when I awoke it was to hear Fernandez scream inarticulate words down the companionway. The quietness of the night was broken by a sonorous booming. When a medley of shouts and running feet sounded overhead, I knew we were in the breakers. I felt the bark staggering and lurching, heard the steward open his door and clatter up the ladder, and Silvera roaring and swearing.

Some one shrieked, "Hard down! Hard down!" and then came a frightful shock.

I was hurled bodily to the floor. I made no attempt to rise, but lay where I fell, listening to the thunder of the waves breaching over the vessel and the hoarse shouts of the panic-stricken crew. The bark was lifting and pounding with dreadful concussions upon the rock or ledge, and amidst the din of falling spars, rending woodwork and crashing seas, the voice of Silvera could be heard directing the launching of a boat with frightful oaths.

All hands seemed to have swarmed aft on to the poop. I could hear the stamping and shuffling of their booted feet on the deck above me; their yells and curses, and the boom and crash of the boarding breakers. Then I remember Slocum bawling something about "dead wall of rock ahead" and "drop off jibboom." There was more stamping of the booted feet, and some one clattered down the companion ladder.

"Dixon, you swine! Ahoy, Dixon! Where are you, you dog! Burn my soul, but I'll cut yer heart out!" and a string of vile oaths.

It was Silvera. I made no answer. He groped about in the darkness until he came to my door. He tried the handle. Finding it locked, he roared:

"Open th' door, you —— ——! You've spiked me, but by —— I'll spike you! Open!"

Receiving no answer, he hammered on the panels with his fists, snarling like a dog and swearing dreadfully. The vessel shuddered to the shocks of the waves breaking over her. Then came a resounding crash

on the deck above, with a splintering and tearing of woodwork; and a roaring welter of sea came like a cataract into the cabin. The water was spurting into my room through the cracks in the door. I expected that the end was coming. Silvera was still in the cabin, but he had desisted from his endeavor to force an entrance to my room. I expect he thought I was dead.

THE water was swashing over my body with every pound of the vessel, when she suddenly canted to starboard and I was thrown violently against the bulkhead. As my room was to port the water drained out, and I found myself lying on the wet planking and still very much alive. Instead of wishing to die, a desire to live was beginning to take possession of me, and I rose to my feet.

The vessel was not pounding now, and though she trembled to the shocks of the seas which broke over her hull, yet it seemed to me she was far from breaking up. The massive oak beams and stanchions in my berth were still holding in spite of the awful hammering the bark had undergone, and I noticed that the oak hanging-knees had not started, nor had the planking opened up. I could not see through the port, owing to the fact that the deadlights had been shipped over them when we passed the Rio Plata in readiness for the stormy weather of the Horn.

The shocks were perceptibly lessening, and as I puzzled myself for an explanation, I remembered the tide.

"Why, to be sure, the tide is falling, and we must have canted over with our decks toward the shore." Thus thinking, I struck a match and lit a candle.

Quietly unlocking my door I peered out. The lee side of the cabin was swashing with water and littered with the *débris* of table and seats. A great gap where the skylight had been yawned overhead, and across the square of gray daylight which showed came streams of chilly spray. The candle was blown out, but there was enough light to discern things by. As I glanced around the flooded apartment I could see no sign of Silvera.

"Must have gone on deck," I murmured, and scrambling across the sloping floor I crawled up the companionway and looked around on the ruin I had wrought. It was blowing very hard and the spindrift from the welter of whitewater we were lying in was flying athwart the air. Ahead towered a great wall of cliff which loomed hazily in the half light of the semi-antarctic morning, and which was blotted from sight intermittently by veils of rainy mist.

The vessel was lying over on her starboard bilge with her bottom facing seaward. All the masts had gone by the board and could be seen in a tangled raffle of spars, canvas and cordage, swashing among the rocks at the foot of the cliffs. The for'ard house was still standing, and I made out something which had been a mystery to me. The tank which had once reposed on top of the house had disappeared, and in its stead I saw the shining barrel of a cannon known as a Parrott rifle-gun!

AS MY eyes got used to the gloom, I saw that we were lying in a slight indentation in the cliff wall—a sort of cove or fiord with a litter of broken rocks and boulders rising in a steep pile to the apex of a triangle formed by two unbroken walls of stone. By crawling for'ard and clambering out on the bowsprit, it would be possible to drop on to dry land. And with the craving for life still strong within me, I jumped below to ransack the pantry for food and water. The storeroom lay to starboard, and to reach it I had to wade waist deep in chilly water.

Entering, I stuffed my pockets and the inside of my shirt with biscuits and some dried apples. There was no water in the place, and trusting to find some when I reached the shore, I crawled along the weather rail to the fo'c's'le head and out on the bowsprit. The headstays were dangling down from the spar, and I was soon slipping and sprawling around on the weed and kelp covered rocks.

Before I gained high-water mark, I was destined to stumble over three almost unrecognizable bodies, but the sight excited no qualms of conscience. They deserved their fate, and though I had the blood of some thirty-three men on my head, I felt that I had become but an instrument of vengeance in the hands of a just Deity.

Heedless of the cold, I scrambled up the slippery boulders to the apex of the cleft. It was with some satisfaction that I noted that the cliffs were not so inaccessible as they appeared from seaward. There were numerous ledges and cracks which would

not make climbing difficult to a sailorman used to scaling giddy heights.

I was tightening my belt and buttoning up my coat in preparation to make the ascent, when I heard the rattle of boulders behind me, and I wheeled around in time to see Silvera in the act of hurling a mighty rock in my direction. With a smothered oath, he hove the stone, and I leaped aside in time to escape being dashed to the ground.

I HAD no weapons, and I was no match for Silvera in strength. But I could see by the terrible look in his eyes that he meant to kill me, and so, as he rushed toward me with his great hands outstretched to grasp my throat, I picked up a small stone and struck him square in the face with it. He stopped and clapped his hands to his mouth. While I backed away, he grabbed another piece of jagged rock and advanced with the blood streaming from his nose and his tangled beard streaked white with crusted salt.

"I'll fix you, my bully!" he roared. "You think you've finished my hash——"

I leaped behind a huge sea-bleached stone just as he hurled his missile, and while he stooped to pick up another, I pelted him with all my strength with another small piece of rock. It struck him on the cheek, cutting it to the bone, and while I grabbed two more, he drove a chunk smack into my ribs with terrific force. I gasped and hurled both my missiles at him. One missed, but the other bowled him over. Following up my advantage, I grasped a large stone and launched it at his head. It struck him square in the middle of the back as he rolled over, and he collapsed with a growl of rage.

Several times he attempted to rise to his feet, but somehow or other he was powerless. While I waited with another stone poised to brain him with as soon as he gained his knees. he gave an agonized cry, more like that of a wild beast than of a human being, and shrieked:

"Kill me! Kill me! My back is broken!"

And as I watched him groveling on the pebbles and clawing out with his hands in a vain effort to rise, I saw that this evidently was the case. My missile had caught him in the small of the back just as he was jumping to his feet, and the blow had broken his spine.

I stepped up to him, still holding on to my stone. He snarled at me like a trapped wolf. His face dripped blood, and with his matted hair, tangled beard, and the eyes literally ablaze with hate and savage defiance, he made a frightful picture as he lay on the gravel with his fingers tearing into the pebbles in his helpless rage.

"CAPTAIN SILVERA!" I said calmly. "You and I are quits now. You've got to make your peace with God for the lives you have sent into eternity for greed of gold. You're a dying man!"

"Dyin' be cussed!" he shrieked. "Oh, blast you, Dixon! It's you that has done all this! It's you that piled th' vessel up——"

"Yes," I answered. "I piled her up and I did it purposely——"

"You did?"

He snapped the question out doubtfully.

"Aye, I did. I fixed your compass; told you to crack on, and there's the result."

And I pointed to the hulk lying a cable's length below in the spume and froth of the breakers.

"What made you do that?" he said after a pause, a little more calmly. "I always treated you well."

"Yes," I replied, "and I was to navigate the bark to Hiva Nuku and then you'd toss me to the sharks. It was my skill as a navigator which saved me, that's all. You'd have hove me over the side off Nantucket Shoals if Joe Smith hadn't told you I had been an officer. I owe you nothing."

He remained quiet for a spell and the savage light died out of his eyes.

"What do you know?" he inquired at length.

"I know that you and your crew were nothing more than pirates pretending to be whalers," I answered. "I know that you looted and sunk two ships, murdering their crews. I wasn't drugged the time the *Sea King* was looted. I did not drink the water until after the crime was committed."

He nodded.

"D'ye think I'll die?"

"You'll die ultimately," I replied without emotion. "We may both die, but you'll die first. A broken back won't kill you right away, but starvation will get you very soon."

And as I shot a glance behind me, I saw the tide was on the turn.

"I'll have to leave you," I said. "Will I haul you up the beach?"

"No!" he growled. "Let me be."

"Will you have a biscuit?"

"No! Save it for yourself; you'll need it soon enough."

I was about to say good-by to him when he spoke.

"Wait a spell, Dixon. I'm goin' t' slip my shackle soon, but I might as well give you a true bill. Stand by for a minute or so, an' I'll get all hands into the tar-pot. Will ye hear me?"

I nodded and sat down on a boulder alongside him. It was raining and bitterly cold. The wind was howling in the fissures; slaty storm-racked sky, gray sea, and gray cliffs fringed with roaring breakers made up a melancholy vista of desolation and misery. Add to the picture of dreary land and sea the battered hulk in the surf, the scattered bodies, the two living creatures—one helpless and doomed already and the other with but a doubtful span of life before him—and the weird and mournful squawk of the penguins in the fissures, and you have an idea of the depressive background in which I listened to Silvera's confession.

CHAPTER X

SILVERA UNBOSOMS HIMSELF

"IF YOU get clear, Dixon, I'll have you make a report on what I'm goin' to say. Go to th' nearest Yankee Consul an' tell him th' whole yarn. I'll bet it'll raise his hair some. Now if you'll listen I'll spin you th' story.

"I've been most kinds of a sailor in my day—privateerin', slavin', an' running' th' slave embargo. Then I went my last two or three voyages whalin' as boat-steerer an' harpooneer. In '61, me and our cooper, a man called Jake Thompson, jumped the ship in New Zealand an' sundowned it for the Otago gold diggin's. We struck it rich, sold out for fifty thousand dollars apiece, and went to San Francisco with our pile.

"Thompson started a kind of tradin' venture among the Islands and I came East an' did some gun-runnin' in a schooner 'round th' Gulf ports. I lost a good deal o' my dollars at that game an' lost th' schooner as well, so I went West again and found Thompson in 'Frisco doin' a roarin' business with his tradin' company. Then I broached my scheme to him.

"They were makin' big strikes in th' Bendigo an' Ballarat gold fields of Australia, an' miners were comin' over to 'Frisco with stories of th' gold that was bein' shipped out o' th' country in th' clippers 'round th' Horn. This give me an idea, an' I reckoned if a man had a fast sailin' packet an' a crew he could rely on there wouldn't be much difficulty in piratin' a few o' them gold ships.

"We talked th' thing over an' we decided that th' best kind o' craft to use for th' business would be a whaler. Whaleships have a kind o' rovin' commission; they kin go anywhere an' cruise aroun' without causin' suspicion. Ye kin carry a pile o' boats an' keep steady masthead lookouts, an' your papers allow you to enter any port.

"Havin' both been whalemen, we decided that a whaler would be th' best kind o' craft to use. A schooner would be too small an' liable to be overhauled by th' first gunboat what seen her cruisin' around, an' a marchant vessel would be more suspicious than anythin', so th' whaler was th' best lay.

"NOW, as it wasn't any easy job pickin' out th' craft what carried th' dust, we had t' figure out some plan for knowin' likely vessels, as I didn't calculate on stoppin' an' overhaulin' every Australiaman we met. You must remember that every ship we stopped would have to be got rid of, or they'd be for reportin' our actions to th' first cruiser they met, an' we'd be done for. So, rememberin' this, we picked up four likely fellows an' let them into our plans, and we fixed things up in this way.

"I was to go East an' buy an' fit out a likely craft for a whalin' voyage. Thompson supplied th' rhino for th' scheme. Th' four men who were in th' game with us were to make for Melbun an' hang aroun' there until they heard of a ship leavin' for England with a consignment o' gold, an' they were to sign on as foremast hands aboard of her. We reckoned that two packets with a bunch o' homeward-bound miners an' their dust would about do us. Th' two men who signed on in each ship were to get into each watch, port an' starboard, so's to be able to keep an eye open for us all th' time.

"Sailormen were scarce enough in Melbun with th' crews cuttin' stick for th' diggin's, an' we knew they'd have no trouble in shippin' themselves. We were to be cruisin' about in th' homeward track jest west o' th' Cape Verde Islands, an' they'd arrange to signal us in some way or other. We fixed things pretty well an' there wasn't so much chance o' mistakes as you'd maybe think.

"I came East by the Overland Trail, an' picked up the *Arcturus* in Savannah very cheap, an' scrapin' up a crew I had her brought to Noo Bedford an' altered for whalin'. Then I got a Parrott rifle-gun an' fixed boards over it to make it look like a tank or bosun's locker——"

"How did you allay suspicions around New Bedford when you fetched that gun aboard?"

"No suspicions at all. A lot o' whaleships carried cannon for protection against pirates in the Eastern channels an' nobody thought anythin' about it. I sounded my crowd what I had scraped together an' made sure they'd be ready for anythin'.

"Then I picked up a feller named Lamson for first mate an' navigator. I was no navigator myself, an' for th' business we needed a good man. This Lamson was a clever joker, but when I broached my plans, he tried to escape while we were anchored out in th' Bay, an' I brained him with a handspike——"

"I thought you said he was drunk and fell down the companionway?"

"Aye, I told you that; but I told you a lot o' things. No, he wasn't drunk, but I hit him too hard an' he croaked. I had to get away to sea after that, as th' feller belonged to Noo Bedford an' I was afraid some of his friends might be comin' out to visit him afore we sailed. I got outside an' cruised around intendin' for to send a boat in to shore next mornin' to get hold of another mate, an' while I was standin' off an' on, your ship 'most cut us down an' you fell aboard. Lucky for both of us. You were jest th' man I needed; ef you weren't, I'd have had you over th' side long afore now. I reckon you know th' rest o' th' yarn pretty well——"

"Tell me!" I interrupted. "What were you going to do if the vessels had passed you in the night?"

He smiled contemptuously.

"I arranged for that. All th' time we were on th' cruisin' ground I had a red an' white lantern hangin' under th' bowsprit, an' every vessel we saw, we gave chase to. We only saw two craft at night, anyhow."

I nodded.

"Finish your story."

"WAAL, there ain't much more. We picked up the *Albemarle* an' got th' signal from our fellows aboard. Then I hocused you out o' the way, an' looted her, an' sent her to th' bottom. We got 'most two hundred an' fifty thousand pounds o' dust an' raw gold out o' her. You knew nawthin' about that.

"Then we picked up the other fellow on th' *Sea King*—his partner was killed off the Horn—an' you say you saw that bit o' work. We got a big pile out o' her—'most as much as the other. That's about all, I reckon, 'cept that we were to lie in to Hiva Nuku until a schooner arrived an' took th' stuff to 'Frisco. We were to follow later an' divide up on th' spoil——"

"The crew as well?"

He gave a wry smile.

"Some o' them only. I would lose a few between the Islands an' th' Golden Gate. Sickness, y'know, forces me to give up th' v'y'ge."

I looked down on him with abhorrence.

"You're a pretty dirty scoundrel," I said. "But I thank the Lord I've fetched you and your gang up all standing. I've been a fool, but I wasn't so foolish as you thought I was, and two can play at a game of bluff. However, it's all finished now and I wish you no harm. Pray, if you know how, for I've got to be moving."

He laughed harshly.

"Pray? Huh! I'm no crawler! If there's such a place as hell, then I'm bound for it, an' there'll be plenty to hail me when I get there, but we'll all go th' same road. Remember Jake Thompson, San Francisco. Ef you get clear, go to a Consul an' swear to what I've told you. I want him to swing. Will you do what I say?"

"If I get clear, I will!"

I was rising to move away, when he cried appealingly:

"Say, Dixon, I'm a goner, I know, but don't leave me to starve. I'll jest ask you one thing an' I hope ye'll do it. Knock my brains out an' put me out o' misery——"

"No, no, no!" I cried, shuddering with the hideousness of the suggestion.

"Then strangle me! Kill me in some way! God, man, don't leave me here to perish alone!"

Sick with cold and the horror of the things I had seen and heard, I staggered up against the rock wall with his entreaties ringing in my ears.

"Come on, Dixon, like a good fellow! Fix me somehow, but don't leave me, for God's sake. Heave me in th' surf! Drownin's easy."

I steeled my nerves and rushed toward him.

"God forgive me!" I murmured, and I dragged and lugged him down to the edge of the advancing breakers.

"Out to th' ledge there an' topple me in!" he commanded.

Obeying his commands, I pulled him over the kelp-covered rocks to the edge of the ledge. Then for a moment my resolution wavered.

"Over with me, man!" he roared. "Over with me! It will be a mercy!"

I stood back in terror.

"I can't! I can't!" I wailed.

His hands clawed at the weeds and he dragged himself to the brink.

"So long!" he shouted, and as I stared at him in paralyzed fright, he rolled into the churning sea.

CHAPTER XI

I CHANGE MY VOCATION

HOW I scaled the cliffs I do not know, but when I came to my natural mind again I was stumbling through the tussock grass and causing an uproar among the penguins, boobies, and other sea fowl nesting in the coarse vegetation. I wandered around for many hours until I stumbled upon a rude hut constructed out of wreckage and sail cloth. Here I lived for days, subsisting upon raw eggs and the biscuits I had brought with me, until I was picked up by a small Falkland Islands schooner beach-combing around the coast for wreckage.

I told them of the wrecked whaler, but nothing of the gold in her lazaretto nor the circumstances which led to my being cast ashore on Staten Land. They cruised in the direction of the place where she was lying, but not a vestige of her fabric remained, though pieces of her hull and spars were seen in the clefts and ledges.

After being landed at Port Stanley I made my way over to Montevideo and reported the affair to the United States Consul. That gentleman promptly had me arrested and confined as a lunatic. I was released and went to Buenos Ayres, and the Consuls, both British and American, listened to my tale with incredulous wonder, and quickly had me thrown out into the street. Not a soul would believe me, and the newspapers published an account of a crazy sailor whose mind had been upset by reading of the disappearance of two homeward-bound Australian clippers.

Eventually I joined a ship bound for 'Frisco. Upon arrival I saw the authorities and told them of the connection of one Jake Thompson with the affair. Thompson's trading company had gone out of business a few months before and Thompson himself was no longer in the city. I was laughed at and discredited wherever I went; the affair was a standing joke in the newspapers for many weeks. They willingly believed that I was one of the *Arcturus's* crew. They believed the peculiar manner in which I had come to be aboard of her. But the rest of my tale was put down to a disorder of the brain induced by the hardships I had undergone.

Rebuffed, laughed at, and jeered on every hand, I soon came to the conclusion that the less I said about the events the better for me and my future prospects. I left the city and went inland gold prospecting, with a determination never to go seafaring again. I kept my word, and the foregoing account, written some forty years after the affair happened, is the only statement I have made since I shook the dust of 'Frisco from my feet.

I am a very old man now, but the Lord has kept my memory green, and though I often desire to forget, nevertheless the horror of those far-off days is still in my mind.

IT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED OTHERWISE

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Chelsea Vase," "The Crimson Track," etc.

THE growth of the thing in his mind had been gradual. When it had obtruded upon his consciousness at first he had drawn back in mingled fear and anger. By degrees, however, he tolerated the thought, only always at a distance, and concluded by allowing it to make a rendezvous of his idle meditations, receiving it much as one might welcome an unwholesome but highly fascinating acquaintance. All the time he knew its real name was Theft.

For three years Parsly had served as station agent and telegraph-operator at the Junction. Each day he had observed the transient bustling by the long platform, the spectacle never varying. Long vestibuled trains halted impatiently, and always the same curious or apathetic faces peered out at him from the Pullmans.

It was the branch line, tapping the lumber country, that contributed humanism, consisting of a nodding acquaintance with timber operators and forlorn commercial travelers. The first were always in a hurry to make the big city connection; the latter lingered in his company for the sake of gaining an audience while they cursed the country.

The last because the Junction was not the liveliest place in the world to put in an hour or two of waiting. Situated where the engineering problem had been the simplest, it was surrounded by blueberry plains, dotted at intervals with scrub pine. As the locomotives annually set the pines afire, the immediate foreground continuously presented a dead, charred appearance. Far-off, the objective point of the Pullmans, loomed the cool silhouettes of mountains, guardians of inland lakes and famous fishing.

More than once Parsly compared himself with Robinson Crusoe in his isolation; only he had no man Friday to enliven his dull routine. He saw much of the passing world but was never of it. Thus, at the end of three years, the hurrying by of the heavy trains aroused a species of resentment. Every one was at liberty to take flight but him. Then again, fifty dollars a month for his combined duties was hardly a compensating solace.

It was the matter of salary that caused the idea to germinate while he was sullenly working the semaphore one day. He had just received from the night branch some four hundred dollars express money which he must deliver to the agent on the morning city-passenger. Having just received his monthly wages he could not help but contrast its meager total with the bulking roll in his hip-pocket.

If he had four hundred dollars, all his own, he would throw up the job and use it in one delicious round of travel. By the time it was exhausted he could obtain another position in a pleasing environment. In logical sequence he decided he might as well allow his imagination a wider range and play at taking a vacation with the largest sum ever entrusted to his care for a single night. He remembered this to be an even thousand dollars, sent down by a big

operator in payment for horses in the lumber camps.

A thousand dollars offered his fancy vastly more possibilities to work with. The four hundred became insignificant. As his duties permitted him much time for reflection, he carried the thought back to his dingy office and entertained it by consulting maps in the railroad folders. In this fashion he took a hurried excursion across the continent and spied out the land. Then he became critical and weighed and balanced different localities.

The Southwest, free from cold, gray Autumnal rains, howling snows and Spring inundations, finally appealed to him as being ideal. Of course, there might be two thousand dollars entrusted to him any night, especially now that it was Autumn and the lumbermen were stocking up for the Winter campaign.

It was at that precise point that his cheek reddened and he felt a touch of alarm as he angrily told himself such imagining was immoral, for it was based on the suggestion that he steal the money. He condemned the suggestion wrathfully as he walked a quarter of a mile to the lonely home where he boarded, and yet he was more downcast than ever over his colorless place in life.

On returning to the station to close up for the night, which meant a weary wait for the up-passenger to pull in, he returned to the suggestion abruptly and recklessly. It was the sight of the porters making up the berths, the comradeship in the smoking compartment, that plunged him into full revolt; only now he proceeded on the theory the money was legitimately his.

"Well, I guess I've earned it. What if I should take it, providing I could get away with it? How would I spend it?"

This surrender eased him much. Of course he wouldn't take it, not a penny; but it's impossible to picture a career of spending until the imagination has logically furnished the requisite possession. Now he had mentally satisfied his imagination as to possession, although the technique was illegal. Fortunately there is no law punishing a man for inwardly discussing the possible assets of a crime.

Of course, Parsly merely intended to pursue his day-dreams unhampered by any irritating self-criticism. He had systematically arranged his data and could spend a million a day, should he choose. That was where he erred. His imagination became a hard taskmaster, very exacting. Once he accepted the suggestion that the money was to come to him through theft, his methodical mind insisted on reviewing the possibilities of detection before permitting him to enjoy the fruits.

"Wouldn't you be caught and arrested before you could make a beginning?" was the cautious query he was forced to put to himself.

Such nagging is very annoying, and to satisfy his mysterious Pyrrhonist and continue with his Spanish architecture, he set himself about planning how the trick could be done without his being detected.

This was a hopeless morass at first, and very unpleasant; for instead of picturing innocent expenditures he found himself sweating and struggling with the problem of how he could keep the money once he secured it. The more he labored the more nimble became his other self in raising pertinent objections, exploding seemingly sound theories and ridiculing his most astute hypotheses.

To merely appropriate the money and disappear was quickly shown to be the height of idiocy. That spelled a life of slinking and fear, the flying from phantoms. It took some thought to clear the foreground of discarded theories and plans and approach the realm of finesse; but at last he seemed to be building on a firmer foundation.

Probably the frequent raids by yeggmen on rural post-offices and isolated railroad stations stimulated this office of his imagination. For in reading the paper, presented him gratis each evening by the newsboy on the up-passenger, he noted the yeggmen always securely tied whoever stood between them and loot, cut the tell-tale wires and escaped.

Then came the great idea; and slapping the paper he glanced apprehensively around the small office, and whispered:

"If I faked a holdup the yeggs would get the credit and I'd get the dough. It would be a cinch, if a man wanted to play crooked."

Stay! Was it so easy? The various precautions necessary for counterfeiting a robbery, each simple in itself, quickly loomed into mountains. Then he decided on just how the furniture should be broken

and overturned to approximate realism; just when the wires should be cut; whether the station door should be left open or closed, and the condition of his clothing and pockets. As there was no safe in the office the agent carried the moneys upon his person. At first he imagined his pockets turned inside out, then repudiated the thought as being too clumsy.

But what about the tying-up portion of the programme? Could a man tie himself so as to convince his rescuers that his predicament was genuine? Of course, there was a chance, rather a good one, too, of his landlord, foreman of the section crew, coming to his aid and cutting the cords without making any particular observations. Still, only perfection of detail would satisfy his exacting critic.

Now, Parsly, if slow of thought at times, was dogged in his persistence once he grappled with a problem. He now gave his spare time to studying ropes and knots.

The newspapers had charged up the various robberies to Fresno Red and his gang, and had dwelt at length on the method used in each case in tying up watchman or agent. Invariably one end of the rope was made fast about the feet and ankles of the captive, then passed up and around the waist, the hands being caught and tied behind the back; the loose end finally being made fast about the captive's neck in a slip-noose.

It was done very quickly, each victim had averred, and so hampered a man that the more he struggled the more he endangered his life by self-strangulation. It was a method worthy of the redoubtable Fresno Red, and one Parsly now attacked to satisfy his insistence on correct detail.

THAT night he surreptitiously carried a piece of new rope home. He had already discovered that new rope would not slip like old, smoothly worn rope. In the secrecy of his small chamber he essayed the simple task of tying his own feet. His heart beat rapidly as he pulled the knot tight; then he laughed vacuously and told himself it was all a game. It ended where it began, merely a pastime. He did not attempt to duplicate the yeggmen's knots further that night.

He would not concede that he stood in fear of the trooping suggestions now besetting him and eagerly offering aid. Yet he fought hard to put the thoughts from his mind during the morning hours and felt extremely virtuous as he handed the down agent the customary parcel of money.

That night he relaxed and deftly tied his feet, passed the line about his waist and clumsily wound it around his wrists. He remained awake more than an hour trying to solve the rest of the problem—how to fasten the rope about his wrists so it would be impossible to free himself and then secure the end about his neck. He decided it couldn't be done, and fell asleep.

Toward morning, when but half awake, he heard a voice advise—

"Tie the rope first about the neck."

He popped up to a sitting posture and stared wildly about the dark chamber. He knew it was a suggestion from his inner self, yet so distinctly did he hear the words it seemed as if they must have been voiced aloud. Throughout the early morning he brooded over the suggestion. At first he could not discern any sense in it. Subconsciously, however, he had often noticed the lumberman's trick of using a clove-hitch—two half-hitches—and gradually the recollection thrust itself above the threshold of consciousness. He believed he had succeeded.

He must make the rope fast about his neck while standing, then secure it about his ankles with practically no slack, continuing the loose end to his waist and tying it, taking care to have it pass outside the rope running from neck to heels. Then by throwing back his head and heels he would obtain enough slack to make the two double loops, or half-hitches, through which he could work his wrists.

The last operation, he realized, would demand great care, as he must thrust his hands in from opposite direcions until wrist overlapped wrist. If it would work he would dismiss the matter and resume the pleasing visions of spending the money.

The morning's paper contained a glaring account of a daring yegg robbery at the Centerville station. The agent had been trussed up and some fifteen hundred dollars taken.

"Those guys certainly got the nerve," commented the newsboy as the agent was reading the item. "Didn't even gag Roberts. Just corded him up like a bale of hay, copped his roll and beat it. Roberts is so scared he's working his notice."

That afternoon Parsly was curious to

examine all baggage fastened with ropes. Several parcels of sample dowels, sent by express from the up-country mill, held his attention the closest. They were tied with new rope and the clove-hitch held tightly, even when he worked an end loose. Just before he closed up for supper the branch train brought in a hundred-odd dollars, but the agent confidentially assured:

"Tomorrer'll be a record breaker. Two parties I know of are going to send down a thousand per. Together with the other money you'll have close to three thousand bones to nurse over night. The danged company ought to put a safe in your office."

Off duty for the night, he hastened to his room where the supreme test awaited him. If he succeeded there was nothing to prevent a man from robbing himself and leaving no clues. When from the open door he could catch the sound of his landlord's heavy, regular breathing, he removed his shoes, seated himself on the edge of the bed, and began experimenting with the cord.

He fastened the noose about his neck and stood up and noted where the rope in a direct line touched the floor. Then seating himself he tied it tightly about his ankles and brought the loose end up to and around his waist. There was scarcely any slack when he straightened out his legs. At first he feared he had drawn the cord too tight and, anxiously turning on his face, threw back his head and heels.

With a thrill of elation he found the slack would enable him, by an effort, to form the hitch. After a moment's fumbling he succeeded, and even wriggled his hands through the loops until the tips of the fingers rested on the upper forearm. It wearied him, and with a sigh of physical relief he extended his legs.

In an instant his tongue felt too large for his mouth, and with a gasp of horror he decided he was choking to death. He did not lose his nerve as he remembered the remedy, and he drew back his legs. But although this gave a bit of slack to the rope he could not induce the hitch to loosen. From the satisfaction of having proven his theory he quickly glided into the fear that he had calculated too nicely.

Had the rope been old and smooth, or had his hands been imprisoned palm to palm, finger tip to finger tip, he might have secured a leverage and by working them apart have succeeded in wrenching one free. But the new rope refused to give, and for a minute he lay quiet, panting for breath, and taking great care to bring no strain on his neck.

Down-stairs the old clock was ponderously ticking off the seconds; and he remained a prisoner. His heart chilled as he feared he must summon the foreman to come to his rescue. But how could he explain his peculiar plight? What suspicions might not his predicament arouse?

This dread quickly gave way before one more chance. The noose seemed to be tightening about his neck, and he remembered the foreman was a heavy sleeper. His wife occupied a room with her small children at the other end of the house. He doubted his ability to call help; if he did not he might slowly strangle to death.

Already the cold sweat was trickling into his eyes and it required a mighty effort of the will to restrain himself from thrashing about. He knew, however, that the moment he lost control of his nerves and moved incautiously his wind would be shut off. Gritting his teeth he drew his heels far back like an acrobat. He was lying face down with the bedclothes half smothering him. Then he gently picked at the rope with his finger tips. Useless. The cords held his wrists like bands of iron.

Finally he managed to work the cord between the fingers of his left hand and exert a pressure upward, hoping to loosen the hitch. His essay was barren of results for some moments, and it was not until he was about to collapse that he felt his right hand moving more freely. With an inarticulate cry of triumph he wrenched his wrist smartly, and instantly felt the cord renew its grip like a sentient thing. It was like a cat playing with a mouse.

Breathing in dry sobs he slowly sought to recover the lost ground and persevered until he again was pushing upward on the cord. For the second time he felt the right hand move a bit; this time he worked it back and forth most gently and at last managed to pull it free. Even then it required some minutes to remove the rope from his throat.

"—— the thing!" he choked, sinking back exhausted. "It nearly got me!"

That night he dreamed of the money brought in by the branch train; only there were cars and cars loaded with it, and it was all in gold, and men were removing it

with huge scoops, just as they shovel out yellow corn.

By morning he had regained his normal tone and even felt inclined to laugh at himself. After all, had he not done what he set out to accomplish—to prove a man could effectually make himself a prisoner? Had he been engaged in a *bona fide* robbery he would not have attempted to free himself. His success in escaping detection would be his utter inability to do so. In that case, of course, he would expect to endure the torture till help reached him.

What odds if a man suffered a few hours of physical agony, if it resulted in supplying him with several thousand dollars? He now clearly appreciated that had his experiment been less successful he would have been grievously disappointed; the problem would have remained an obstacle to his imagination, and his dangerous, although alluring, fancies needs must be postponed. On the whole he felt rather proud of his achievement.

ALL day the great idea kept pounding through his head. He had it in his power to obtain more than two thousand, possibly three thousand, dollars without being suspected. His temples throbbed and ached as the thought assailed him. Once or twice during the afternoon he was called to the baggage-room to check a trunk. Each time his gaze involuntarily sought the coil of new rope hanging behind the door.

It was well known to students of crime that yeggmen pick up their tools on the premises of the place robbed, traveling unhampered by the burglar's usual outfit. How natural that they should appropriate a piece of this very cord to bind him with! That would necessitate the shattering of the lock, but the door was old and weak and a well-delivered kick would smash it loose. He had no appetite for supper and heard but little of the foreman's gossip.

"I was saying I'd like to play you a game of crib tonight if you feel in trim," repeated the foreman.

"Crib? Oh, of course. Sure, Danny. I'll play crib. I'll be home right after the up-train pulls out. I'll be home in good season," eagerly promised Parsly, suddenly realizing the foreman might get impatient at waiting, might take alarm at his boarder's failure to reach home, and go in search of him. That would eliminate long, slow hours of torture on the office floor.

"Yes, I'll be home right after the nine-o'clock goes up," he said. "I won't keep you waiting."

While returning through the woods it suddenly came home to him that he had planned to steal the money. For a moment he felt strongly moved and made a feeble pretense of denying the accusation. Then with a drawn face he muttered:

"—— it! Why sidestep? It's been in my nut for days. I'll never get another chance like this—so much dough and the yeggs near."

He sought to distract his mind by bitterly assailing the railroad and express companies and assuring himself the thought would never have occurred to him had he been paid something beyond a starvation wage for a fourteen-hour day. It really wasn't robbery. Laws were made by men. It was reprisal. When it came to the ethics of it—only Parsly didn't know what the word meant—he'd earned the money, at least a part of it.

The night connived at his purpose, blowing up cold and desolate and on the verge of a storm. By the time the branch pulled in, the platform was streaming rivulets from the heavy downpour, and the express agent made the office on the run.

"Here's the stuff!" he yelped, tossing a package on the table. "Nothing to hold us and we're going right back. So long."

Parsly breathed more freely. Sometimes a mixup over freight, or a hot-box, kept the train, with the men careless of the passing minutes, as they had no schedule to make on the return run to Waverly, the first station, where they would hold the siding for the night.

Outside, the rain was falling with a thunderous clamor, smearing the window panes till it was impossible to make out the switch-lights directly in front of the station. Parsly rose, his eyes glittering. The money must be concealed safely till the morrow.

He had never read Poe's story of the purloined letter, yet instinct urged a simple hiding-place. He decided on the greasy canvas coat, hung back of the door. He wore it only when cleaning the switch-lamps. The packge fitted nicely into one capacious pocket. No one would ever find it there. Now to arrange the stage settings, the overturned furniture, the open door——

The door opened. Four men were crowding in through the miniature waterfall released from the loaded eaves. Parsly eyed them as one entranced, his gaze frozen with horror. It was no physical fear he dreaded, but for the moment it seemed as if his evil purpose had escaped him and now stood crystallized into tangible shapes, each a unit of wickedness.

"Nail the mutt!" sharply ordered the leader, a man with a heavy shock of red hair.

One of the men twisted Parsly's arm behind him and thrust an iron wrist under his chin. Two others stood near, one holding a revolver, the other caressing a "life-preserver." The leader was glancing about the office.

All this occurred in a single motion, yet it seemed to cover ages to the stupefied agent. It was the red-headed man's prowling gaze that brought Parsly to his senses. They were yeggmen—Fresno Red and his gang. They were after the money and the leader was seeking the safe.

The man who had seized the agent was deciding he had never in all of his strong-arm jobs encountered so thoroughly frightened a victim as now, when Parsly's chin hugged in and his strong teeth bit deeply into his captor's wrist, causing him to scream with pain. At the same instant, the agent's long leg kicked out, overturning the table and the one lamp.

The room was plunged in darkness and the man with the revolver discharged his weapon, evoking a shriek of mortal agony, but not from the agent. Fresno Red called loudly for a light while he attempted to strike a match. Parsly had the advantage; he knew one of the robbers was dead or seriously wounded, and while every man was his enemy in the darkness, the yeggmen feared to injure a pal.

"Block the door and window!" roared Fresno Red.

During this brief leeway Parsly's groping hands found the office stool and he swung it around his head in a deadly circle. By the sickening crunch he knew at least one of the enemy was off the active list. Then a match flared up for a second and the leader's revolver exploded, the agent experiencing a stinging sensation in the side.

For an instant Parsly felt strangely numb; then the stool rose like a flail and the man with the "life-preserver" sank to the floor.

Somehow the agent now felt a riotous elation. Fear was a very distant emotion. His veins were filled with molten lead instead of blood. He breathed hate rather than the smoky air. It was a monstrous thing that these murderers should seek to rob his employers.

With a wild howl of rage he plunged into the remaining two men, kicking and smashing like a maniac with the fragment of the stool. Out through the door they poured, another of the gang falling with a fractured skull. Then Parsly discovered he was alone.

He stood stupidly for a few moments, weaving back and forth. He aroused himself as his dull ears caught a familiar sound. A hand-car was being pumped down the grade. His mind cleared to supernormal lucidity. He saw his advantage. He had been brutally attacked and seriously wounded. The one man escaping would be charged with having stolen the money; they wrested it from him in the struggle. He had fought hard; he'd earned it. And yet, should he pull the lever close by his right hand, he could throw open the switch down the line and send Fresno Red crashing into the empty coal-cars on the siding.

"You'll never get a better chance! It simply can't be known and——"

"No!" he yelled, springing to the lever and pulling it back with his last ounce of strength.

"No, —— you! No!"

Within the next minute he heard a dull crash and knew the yegg leader had collided with the coal-cars. Then he concluded the wet platform would be an ideal place for a red-hot body to rest on.

"FOR the love of Mike! Parsly down and out! One man groaning and another dead in the office, one stiff out here! Good Heavens!" exclaimed the horrified foreman as he held up the lantern. He had come because Parsly had failed to keep his promise as to the game of cribbage.

As he read the full story in the four prostrate forms he collected his wits and dragged Parsly into the office, meanwhile begging him to "Wake up," and "Get back his nerve."

"What's the row?" feebly asked Parsly. Then he remembered.

"I've been shot. Find the instrument and see if the wires are O. K. Hold me up

where I can reach it. I must send in the alarm. The leader is down on the siding somewhere. I shunted him off into the empties."

"The desperate devils was going to make sure," panted the foreman as he hunted for the instrument. "They fetched two coils of rope."

THE papers made a great hero of Parsly. Fresno Red, who was found with a broken shoulder, gave him a brave record for being game. The railroad sent a superintendent to tell him he was in line for promotion and the express company guardedly considered presenting him with a reward.

"I don't want any money," growled Parsly as the agent sat by his bed in the little house.

"Cut that out. I did nothing but what's in the day's work. But I'd like the Centerville job. Roberts, they say, is going to quit. That pays a hundred a month."

He was appointed two days later. Only now he hates the sight of coiled rope and looks upon express money as so much junk.

CHIQUITA OF THE LEGION

by Donald Francis McGrew

Author of "The Grenadier," "The Guns of the Seventy-Third," etc.

I MET the man first when he came in with a batch of recruits for the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbès, Algeria. The girl I had known for some time. *He* was big, young, blonde, the product of rich American parents of this day and age; she was Spanish youth and fire. They called her "Chiquita of the Legion."

Him being the only American with the *bleus—merde!* his clothes were cut the way they are cut along Fifth Avenue, and it gave me a gulp in the throat—I was tempted to fall on his neck. But he gave me a slight chill at the outset—he wasn't used to the soldiers' method of self-introduction.

"My God!" I heard him groan under his breath. "My God!" And his eyes took in the surroundings.

I read his thoughts. He was sizing up the barracks of the Legion—his home for the next five years. The big yard, all sprinkled with gravel, and bare as the prison parade at Aden; the monstrous unpainted barracks, looming up like so many barns in the middle of a Wyoming plain; the high thick walls like those that clamp in the dead city of Nire; overhead a hot African sun beating down from a glazed blue sky—say! It was a cheerful picture. Three thousand *légionnaires* in white fatigue clothes couldn't enliven it—their faces had soaked in something as listless as the voice of the muezzin calling to prayer.

"My God!" he muttered again. "*Five years——!*"

"You'll get used to it," was my cheering comment. "What's your name, now? And how'd you come to do it?"

He started to turn away from me, but I caught him by the arm.

"Son," I said, "we try to grin and bear

one another here. Especially countrymen. Try to get into my company—the ninth—and maybe I can help you out."

Well, he apologized then; and after he was assigned to my company, I *was* able to help him quite a bit. But all through his bath, and drawing his clothes, he acted like a man in a sick dream, answering me only with short grunts; and when he drew his kit, and stood there moping over that pile of blue trousers, blue tunics, white trousers and kepis, not knowing which strap was which, I had to give him what-for. On the outside I would have dropped him; but he had good cigarettes, and money—which means wine, in the Légion.

"Buck up," I said. "You're in for it now. Here—here's how you make the *paquetage;* and this is the way you make your bunk; and here's what you put in your knapsack. You've got it to do—that or prison. So do it."

Perforce he did buck up a little then, but when soup call came, he stuck up his nose at the thought of *la gamelle.* We old *légionnaires* were banging on the table with our tins and yelling: "*Alles schieb' los! A la soupe, soupe!*" at the *garde chambre*—that famous yell of the Legion—when he hunches me and wants to know where we can buy a good meal.

Instanter my pan had gone to another fellow and we were heading past the sergeant at the gate. Trust me to know where I could get a good meal—after six months in the Legion!

"I'll take you to the Café de la Légion," I told him as we hurried through the yellow sand of the streets and into the alley district.

He stuck up his nose with a wry face—those Spanish Jews and Arabs in the Ghetto district do smell bad—they and the filth and the heavy, sweet odor of musk and Arab cigarettes; and he cast a longing look back at the better streets.

"You're not welcome back there," I grinned. "Ah, *ces malheureux légionnaires!* I'll take you to Chiquita's place—Chiquita of the Legion."

"Chiquita?" he says. "That means sweetheart in Spanish, don't it?"

I nodded, and he looked at me, grinning cynically.

"The sweetheart of the Legion," he murmured. "Is she——"

"No," I cut in, "she is *not.*" And I added with some heat:

"She's the sweetest, cleanest thing in Sidi-bel-Abbès. The Legion swears by her."

He whistled, looking at me sideways, and begged pardon.

"Tell me about her," he says then; so I told him about Chiquita of the Legion as we walked through the alleys of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

She was a young Spanish girl, I told him, who had been thrown on her own resources when her daddy died mysteriously after some trouble with the Algerian-French government. Some way they'd taken his vineyard. So she gathered together a few chairs and tables, put up the shack which she graced by the name of "Café de la Légion," and started to sell coffee to the foreign soldiers.

It wasn't such good coffee, I pointed out, but it was cheap. And somehow she had a way of giving a friendly smile—even a coquettish smile—with each cup and still retaining the respect of the *légionnaires.* She was the only woman in Sidi-bel-Abbès who deemed them worthy of being treated on terms of equality, and the Legion did not forget. Whenever the companies were ordered against the Arabs in the South, many knapsacks full of loot came back across the hot sands to Chiquita. Consequently her walls were hung with *purios,* draped about among her drawings—oh, he would find hers an interesting place.

"You'll find her interesting, too," I added. "Only be careful she don't become *too* interesting. We all fall in love with her now and then—but it's of no use. I think she's in love with her drawings?"

"Drawings?" he said real quick. "You mean she does them herself?"

"Yes," I said. "Crude pieces of work, but very good for one who has never had any instruction."

"Ha!" he exclaimed then. "This is getting interesting. An undiscovered genius, perhaps, with beauty—surely she has beauty—who cooks your meals and does a crayon of you—in the city of the Foreign Legion. *Très bien, mon camarade*—let us hurry."

His eyes began to sparkle, and his lips to quirk at the corners; and after we'd taken aboard some wine and arrived at last at Chiquita's, he'd begun to act like a real live young American who'd never "stuck up his hand" in the Legion.

CHIQUITA——I remember how she looked that night, and how he bowed to her in a sort of humorous mocking way when I introduced him; and how her eyes sparkled when she laughed and tossed her black head at him in return. They made a picture, those two, with us red-trousered *légionnaires* in the background. I sha'n't soon forget it.

Chiquita—she *was* a picture, a little colored masterpiece; only she laughed at you out of the canvas. She was real, which is better than the result of a brush. For some reason she used to affect a Moorish costume without a veil—possibly because it was cooler—a sort of white-hemmed blue overgarment that hung from her head and over the shoulders to her ankles. Underneath that was a shorter garment of heavy purple, which in turn covered baggy trouserlets of yellow silk caught up and fastened at the ankle. It went well with her olive cheeks and black eyes; she was all color and piquancy and life sitting up there with her little slippers poised on the rungs of her high stool.

Riordan? He saw it, never fear. And she saw him. Which was natural enough, too. There aren't many big blond Americans come into the Legion who show unmistakable earmarks of culture and urbanity, and have blue eyes that sparkle and red lips that curve besides. *Voila!* Who made the world the way it is, anyway?

"This is excellently done," he made a beginning, going over to one of the etchings. "And this—the touch here is very, very good. Surely mademoiselle has been with a master?"

Well! Did we have that meal? We did. Chiquita was indeed glad to serve us—she told us so—and she did, while the other poor devils of *légionnaires* sat around and envied us. The taste of that meal stuck in my memory.

But between mouthfuls I got Riordan's story. It was simple enough, as was mine. I got a berth at Bassorah on the Persian Gulf as supercargo on the tramp *Wizard* out of Seattle. A little fight ashore at Oran tied me up with the French authorities. It was either jail or the Legion. Young Riordan, he'd had a berth spending the old man's money and dabbling in art in France until the "art" of Monte Carlo soaked him—that and some chit of a girl. Instead of a bullet and a last sad note, he decided to become a soldier of fortune.

"Lord!" he sighed. "I couldn't see anything but the governor's face across the pond. Then I got dreams—ye gods, dreams——"

"Of maybe bringing a commission home to the old man through some glor-ee-yus deed on distant battlefield?" I filled in the pause for him. "And they commenced opening up your eyes even at Marseilles."

"Don't mention it," he grimaced. "Let's have wine—red wine—I still have a little money, at any rate. We'll drink—we'll all drink to the Legion. Eh—Señorita Chiquita?"

"To the Legion!" she laughed; and I saw her eying him covertly from her stool when he turned away.

She sold no wines, but for the first time she allowed her *légionnaires* to send out for it. So we made merry until time to go to barracks. Now and then when she wasn't so busy she and Riordan stepped around to the pictures, talking of "lines" and "backgrounds" and "tones" and other things alien to us; then Riordan got to singing songs and playing on Chiquita's guitar to an audience that by that time crammed the place full. Chiquita did a roaring business that night—what time she wasn't laughing with Riordan.

"She's got real talent," he told me on the way home. "Gad! I'm quite interested. If she only had a chance in Paris, now; or Florence——"

"Most likely she never will," I commented.

"No, I guess not." Then he seemed to dismiss the matter, and started humming a tune.

He didn't hum a tune in the morning, though. He got his first dose of *gymnastique des bleus*, and it went as follows:

Awake just before six. Coffee in bed—no breakfast; then reveille, sweep out from under your bunk, get ready and fall in for drill neatly and completely uniformed and equipped for drill—all in ten minutes. One button wrong meant barrack arrest, *la cellule* or the Zephyrs, according to the temper of the sergeant. Then out to the drill grounds, and the command, "*Formez les faisceaux. Sac à terre!*" ("Lay down your knapsacks and pile arms.") Then, "*Pas gymnastique! En avant! Marche!*"

Yes, that's all. "At the double—march." Just that and nothing more. A run that

is kept up, on no breakfast, for thirty-minute stretches, interspersed with boxing and Swedish gymnastics until first soup call at ten o'clock. Lungs bursting, head splitting—*Nom du bon Dieu*, the Legion! It has crumpled many a man's lungs like paper.

At ten Riordan dragged himself in and threw himself on the bunk like a dead man. He kept twisting himself from side to side with the agony of his pumping lungs. His face was gray and lined and old.

"My God!" he groaned. "It killed one man this morning—hemorrhage of the lungs."

"They figure they have plenty more," I told him.

"But what's it *for?*" he demanded in a wail.

"To harden you so you can march."

" 'Run,' the corporal said, 'run or die.' "

"Sure. March or die—*c'est la Légion.*"

"And what's for this afternoon?"

"For you," I said, "rudimentary instructions; for me, either a twenty-four-kilometer march, or *corvée*. Cleaning the sewers of the Arab prison, building a villa for some fat Levantine, piling forage for the native Spahi cavalry. For five centimes a day."

"My God!" he groaned. "And that's what I graduate to when I get turned for full duty."

He stared into space as I have seen convicts stare in the Death's Row, then turned back to me.

"Do they ever fight?" he asked.

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes? Say—what is this Legion *for?*"

"For?" I said. "My son, it is for France. It is for students of social conditions to talk about—and do nothing. It is for escaped convicts. It is for hungry men who sell their souls for five centimes a day. It is for cheap colonization projects. It is for building roads and cities. It is for the protection and filthy service of filthy Arabs and harping Jews who spit on the men that protect them. It is for fools. Work or die, march or die, fight *and* die—*c'est la Légion!*"

"And if you buck——"

"*La cellule*, the Zephyrs, or the prison battalion."

"*La cellule!*" His face contorted into a horrible grimace. "I went past the cells. Thirty men in a room nine by twelve. I could smell them thirty feet away."

La gamelle went then, and we broke off. He didn't turn up his nose at it this time. No. He fell on it like a wolf.

And so his life as a *légionnaire* began.

From that time he was two distinct personalities—by day gloomy, silent, a machine, coming to life only at night. Wine, red wine, and the sympathy of Chiquita—he lived for the nights. And so, it seemed, did she. He'd sing songs, and talk to her about her pictures—oh, one could see how things were going. If he happened to be detained on guard, her face would fall.

Well, one night the sergeant at the gate sent me back to repolish my shoes, and Riordan went on ahead. It was then that I saw with my own eyes how far things had gone.

The sun was just setting when I left the gate. The big molten disk swung down back of the hook in the nearby Thessala mountains, and its slanting rays played over the flat roofs of Sidi-bel-Abbès like spears from a sea of gold. I remember how the place looked that evening; and when I reached the Café de la Légion, those two were alone in the dim interior. They didn't hear me. And how could they? She was standing on tiptoe, crushed against his breast, his lips on hers. Even the dimness couldn't hide the light in her face. I could see her tremble from ankles to head; then her eyes closed——

I coughed, and they turned to me—she red and sweet and confused. She ran into the kitchen, while he and I bridged the awkwardness over a liter of wine. But I told him a few things later.

Said I:

"You'd best treat her right. She isn't merely Chiquita—she's an ideal to these men who have come to believe that there's no more good in the world. Treat her wrong and they'll tear you to pieces."

He merely shrugged, with a remark about handling his own affairs, so I didn't mention it again.

Then one night some one stole the remainder of his money from under his pillow.

That was the beginning of the end. Perforce he had to stay at the barracks more now, as he had no money to hire his washing and polishing done. The only time you get to do that in is after second soup call in the evening. He'd never done

a day's work in his life, and "policing up" didn't come natural to him; pretty soon he got to getting into trouble with the non-coms, and finally they soaked him two days' *cellule* for a dirty kit.

He came out of there smelling to heaven, covered with vermin. His eyes were two grim black holes in a pasty ashen mask.

"It's the last straw," he swore. "They ran me around with a knapsack filled with sand on my back. God! I can hear that corporal's, '*À droit—droit!*'—I'll hear it in my dreams. I'm going."

"Got money?" I asked.

"No!"

"Then you're crazy. Without it you'll buck the desert; starvation that will drive you to Spanish farmers who are only too glad to give you up; the Arab gendarmes who will turn you in for the prize-money, and Arab tribes that will cut you up for your clothes. Even if you pass them you have to have papers at the ports, unless you can smuggle aboard. Why don't you wait until you get money from home?"

He wouldn't listen to the last. He seemed afraid of his daddy. He only shook his head, muttering to himself, then finally took himself off to town.

"I'll find *some* way," he swore.

He did, too. He came to me an hour later in the canteen, and took me off to one side. His face was beaming.

"She's going to lend me the money," he said, firing it all at me at once. "And get me a suit of civilian clothes, and——"

"Hold on," I said, leading him out of there. "You'll be giving this away. You come with me down to Chiquita's—you two kids will need Tommy Patten to keep your heads cool."

"She says she's going with me, too," he blurted then.

"Wait until we get there before you tell me any more," I said. "Then we'll straighten out the plans."

Well, she confirmed what he had said, sitting there on his knee back in the little café kitchen. Man, she was happy—glancing down at him, and him looking up now and then rather red as to face. Hers—the color came and went in her cheeks like the soft glow-lights of the Ranabas off Marsel-Leroo, and every now and then the round arms would tighten 'round his neck with a little spasmodic jerk, and her red lips touch all over his face in a hundred little kisses. All the while she prattled on like a happy little kid. Thank the good God, she said, she had saved enough to meet this one time in her life. She had not imagined the good God would be so good to her. Spain—the Spain her father had talked about—with Dick; and an inexpensive little villa—oh, life had turned out to be a wonderful thing.

At last, though, I had to cut in on her and throw the cold water of common sense on her outlook. They were taking grave chances. They must take every possible precaution against possible detection and capture.

"That's what I told her," Riordan broke in eagerly. "She wants to go with me. They may put the two departures together if we go, as she suggests, by carts to the coast and then over to Spain in a hired fishing-smack. It is best for me to take chances on a steamer and have her follow on another boat."

"No!" she cried. "How do you know what boats are in Oran? You would have to leave there as soon as possible on the first boat. Perhaps it would be one right to France. With no papers—no. I will not listen. You could not cable, for all messages are censored here. Listen—" and she turned in appeal to me—"see if this is not the best plan."

She was to take his measure, get his clothes, then leave the café in charge of a girl friend. She would then go into the country on a visit to some trustworthy friends of her father's. The Arabs they employed formerly worked for her family, and these could easily be induced to take them via cart train to Tjecamen, near Oran on the coast. They would travel at night with Dick under cover in case they met a patrol. Three days she would wait at her friend's, so that there might be no connection between the two departures; then he was to come. Her Arab friends could easily arrange with the fisherman at the coast to take them to Spain.

"She's right," I told Riordan. "But now—what's going to happen when you get to Spain?"

She buried her face in his neck so quick I could not see his eyes.

"What but one thing?" he retorted. "We'll be married; then I'll cable the governor that I'm off to a new start. He'll come across then, I'm sure."

"H'm," I said. "Why don't you get married here?"

He looked out from behind her shoulder pretty quickly at that.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "That would expose us sure. No one could help putting the two departures together then. Find one, find the other."

I had to admit that he was right, but on the way home I put my hand on his arm and stopped him.

"That girl is risking her savings, and running chances of the prison battalion for helping a *légionnaire* desert," I said—"for *you*."

"She won't have it any other way," he muttered.

"No," I said. "She won't. She's that kind. The governor won't have any cause to be ashamed of the kind of grandchildren she's going to bring him—if she does."

"I wish she'd listen to coming on another boat," he muttered in a troubled tone.

"She's got the best plan," I said. "Best come on now and go to sleep."

The next morning we heard that Chiquita would be gone for a time from the Café. We knew then the first move was on. But during the next three days Riordan was so fidgety I had to keep an eye on him for fear he'd forget some part of his uniform and get thrown into cells again. He fretted himself about a possible slip here and a slip there until he had me on the raw edge myself.

FINALLY, though, the night came. And how he did polish and primp to make sure of passing inspection at the gate! I had to warn him for fear his very eagerness would warn the corporal of our squad that something unusual was afoot, and had to shake him up again when we got beyond the gate.

"Don't run," I scolded. "Stroll along like I do. I'll lead you out all right."

"Oh!" he said. "Are you going beyond the walls?"

"Certainly."

"But if they catch you——"

"Pouf! Two days' barracks arrest for stealing grapes. You need me. You're too excited."

"I'm afraid you'll be caught," he insisted; but I wouldn't listen.

So we made for the city walls by alley routes, slipped by a patrol, and went up and over and away through the vineyards. I couldn't hold him back then—he hit up the Legions' double time, and I had to follow.

We made those two miles in no time, keeping in the shadows as much as possible. Then we heard a swift rustling of soft garments, and Chiquita was in his arms.

I let her have him a minute; but time was precious. I saw the shadowy carts and Arabs waiting near by. I urged him to hurry.

"Change quickly," I told him, "and bring back every piece of your uniform so I can see that it finds its way to the quartermaster. If you get caught you don't want to be tried for stealing your kit."

He slipped into the shadows, and Chiquita ran to me and clutched at my arm. I was so good to help—she would never forget—surely the good God would not allow him to be caught.

"Tut, tut," I said, "everything is going to be all right." I assured her that I was confident they would make it all right.

That is what I told her—but I sha'n't soon forget standing there with that girl all atremble beside me. It isn't any too pleasant playing a sort of helpless foster-father to a young girl that's sincere and true and good and playing a game for her lover with all her possessions and freedom at stake. No, it isn't so pleasant—especially when you feel all her fears and anxieties, and being a man and older, and wiser, you see a lot more she hasn't guessed at as yet. She was that close to me—the trembling of her hands—the faint, sweet odor that came from her hair——

Then, after an age, Riordan appeared. She ran to meet him and then walked back with him toward me.

My eyes were on him, inspecting. The clothes weren't any too good, being second-hand; still they fitted well enough as far as I could see. But I wasn't noticing that as much as something that was making itself felt in his manner—something that chilled me; and when he handed me his uniform bundle with a remark about his new shoes hurting his feet, a strange silence fell on us all—a silence that made me sick at heart.

She, too, felt it. She looked up at him, wide-eyed.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Chiquita," he said, and stopped. His

voice was strange and husky. Then—"I found the money in the clothes."

"Yes, yes, five hundred francs. You must handle the purse now."

"But I want that you should take half of it. I——"

He paused, then went on with a rush:

"I have been thinking about this all along. It is not best that we go together. I can go on to one of the up-country stations and then to Oran by rail—oh, I'll make it all right—I'll cable you when I am safe."

I remained silent. I was not amazed, for I had been halfway expecting this; but I looked at her. She stared at him in utter unbelief—it was as if he had struck her a blow.

Never have I seen greater misery depicted in a human face. She had guessed the truth at last. There was at least something honest enmeshed in the bottom of the boy. His face and eyes were poor liars even if his words did evade. He had never intended to take her with him.

"Dick!" she cried very low. I can hear it yet. It had sadder notes than the Wongo lament of the women on Leno-La-Nee.

A great anger seized me then.

"You cur!" I choked; and was on him like a wolf.

Big he was, but he stood no show with me in that rage. He went down, fighting, but with me on top, my bayonet at his throat.

Then Chiquita grabbed my arm.

"No!" she screamed. "No! Would you——"

"No, I'll not kill him," I said. "But I'll make him put on that uniform again and go back to barracks." And I tightened my grip on his throat.

H'm. . . Yes, Haig and Haig, Willard. Four fingers. . . Yes. . .

Well, I expect you're wondering what came next. I didn't think she'd want me to hurt him—that's a woman's way—but I wasn't prepared for what followed.

"Let him up," she said, and her voice was that strange and quiet I did so in a sort of trance. I have heard the same tones in the voices of priests when they give the absolution.

He got up stiffly, with a murderous look at me, but stood still—her voice held him, too. So they remained, she looking at him as if she couldn't look enough; then she spoke.

"You do not know what love is," she told him. "Some day you may learn. I will always love you, no matter what you do. No—" to me as I tried to speak—"you must let him go. Five years—for him—in the Legion? *Nom du bon Dieu*, it would kill him. No! You must keep the money—Dick. Now please go!"

Yes, that's what that little girl said to him out there under the stars in that Algerian night. A girl that was born in the provinces and had never seen her native Spain. A girl born near—Beard of the Prophet—the Foreign Legion! Yes. And even in the temperate zone you get to thinking that all that's good and noble is pictured on the stage.

As for him, he mumbled something—he couldn't talk—and stumbled off through the darkness, while she watched him, still and dry-eyed.

No, she didn't break down. If she did, she kept it from me.

Ah! One needs a drink, remembering a scene like that. A little more ice, Willard. Thanks. . . It sticks in the memory. . .

Well—it stuck in his memory, too. Yes, he made it all right. Made it to Florence and the American colony. Quite a group of artist friends, he found. And he cabled his father, who, instead of sending him money, came a-footing on the next boat to take care of that prodigal son. Wouldn't trust him until he'd seen him. The boy 'fessed up then and made a clean breast of the whole affair.

Then he wrote me.

No, I won't tell you what he wrote. He sent me the money with which I later made my getaway. But I won't tell you what he wrote. I wouldn't want a man to tell what *I* said if I penned him a letter straight from the bottom of my heart, like that boy did. Doggoned if it didn't make me feel almost as good as Chiquita did when he wrote to her.

Yes, he saw his mistake. A little time away from her had opened his eyes. He sent for her. They're up there now in a villa, daubing at pictures together. Those two, and the kid——

What? You thought the yarn was going to have an unhappy ending. Why——

I must have been in love with her, then? You're a liar!

BEYOND THE LAW

A Complete Novelette

by

Jackson Gregory

Author of "The Crimson Mask," "The Red Law."

CHAPTER I

WATSON HEARS HIS CALL

"DID you ever kill a man?"

The question came quietly out of a long silence. The younger man looked up quickly from the crackling camp-fire, his eyes searching his partner's grave face for an explanation of the strangely dull note in his voice.

"No, Johnny. I never killed a man. Why?"

Johnny Watson made no answer for a little as he drew thoughtfully upon his pipe. The little, drying mountain stream upon which they had camped for the night went singing on its way under the stars.

Neither of the two men so much as stirred until after the younger man had almost forgotten the abrupt question, and was thinking upon the bed he had made of willow branches, when Johnny Watson took the pipe from between his lips, ran a brown hand across the grizzled stub of his ragged mustache and continued in the same expressionless monotone:

"I have. Three of 'em. One close to thirty years ago, Dick. A sailor, he was; and a sailor of a sort I was, too, in those days. Down where the South Seas is used to man-killing. I had a little money, a good deal for a sailorman to have all at one time, sewed in a bit of canvas in my shirt. Ben, he had been drunk and was mean and reckless, or I guess he wouldn't 'a' done it—Ben was a decent man after his fashion.

"He come up behind with a knife. I saw his shadow, and I give it to him across the temple with a bit of scrap-iron laying on the little pier. He died two days later.

"One was twenty years gone now. They called him DeVine, and he was the crookedest man that ever put on white man's clothes. It began with cards, and ended with him trying to do me on a mine. He knowed when I had caught him, and pulled his gun first. He missed me about six inches, and we wasn't standing more than seven feet apart. . . .

"And one was something more than eight years ago. He was no account. He murdered old Tom Richards. Tom was a pardner of mine. Tom's body wasn't cold yet when the man as murdered him went to plead his case with the Great Judge."

Again the deep stillness of the mountains shut in about them. Young Dick Farley stared curiously into his partner's face, wondering. And since the ways of the cities of the earth were not forgotten by him, the ways of men, where judges and courts and written laws were not, were new to him—he shivered slightly.

For two years he and the man who was speaking quietly of the murderous killing of men, and the killing of men in retribution, had lived together in that close fraternity for which the West has coined the word "pardnership" from a colder word; and

never had he heard old Johnny Watson talk as he did tonight. And still he waited for the man to go on, knowing that there was some reason for this unasked confidence.

"There's some things a man can explain," went on Watson. "There's a Lord's sight more he can't. When you've lived as long as I have, Dickie, alone a big three-fourths of the time, maybe you'll be like me and not try to look under things for the *why* so long's you know the *what*.

"I know now you and me are on the likeliest trail I ever put one foot down in front of the other on. And I know it's my last trail! It's 'So long' for you and me, pardner. And I'm going to know real soon what's on the other side of things."

Dick Farley sought a light rejoinder with which to meet an old miner's superstition, but he could find no words. So again there was silence between them until Watson once more spoke:

"I killed them three men in fair fight, Dickie, and with the right o' things on my side. And it ain't ever once bothered me. And now the funny part of it—I ain't so much as thought of one of them men for a month.

"You know we got too much to think about, you and me, with the trail leading us straight to more gold—our gold—than would sink a battle-ship. And today? Well, when the sun shines in my eyes, and I wake up slow, I'm kinder dazed for a little while, and while I can't get my bearings I'm back in the South Sea country with Ben, the sailorman. Just as plain as I'm seeing you now, Dick, I saw him. Twisted thumb and all—and I hadn't thought about that twisted thumb from that day over thirty years ago until this very morning! And all day I've been walking first with Ben and then with Flash DeVine, and then with Perry Parker, as did for poor old Tom Richards."

HE BROKE off suddenly, sitting lurched forward, his eyes meditatively upon the fire. Then he continued:

"A man that didn't know would think it was all nonsense. But most men that live in the way-out places of the earth, and who've took men off, fair and square—or with a knife from behind; it makes no difference—would know what I know. I don't know the *why*, pardner. And I don't care why. You'll be looking for a new side-kick before Summer dies."

Dick stirred uneasily. Again he sought for a light, bantering reply. But the words did not come. A strange sense of fatality had crept slowly over him.

He tried to tell himself that he was listening to the expression of an old miner's superstition, that the thing was an absurdity. And while he refused to give credence to a thing which he could not understand, he had an odd sense that he and Johnny Watson were not alone. Unconsciously he drew a bit closer to the fire and to the man who was "seeing things."

"And this here the likeliest trail I ever set foot down on," said the older man, with nothing but a vague regret in the even tones. "Just two more days and we're there—maybe together and maybe you finish the trail alone, pardner. It's a month ago I picked up that first big yellow lump. The whole mountainside is rotten with gold! And then I come back and picked you up like we'd said we would, you wearing your shoes out on flinty rocks where a man wouldn't find a color in seven lifetimes. And now we're in two days of it, and——"

He didn't finish, breaking off with a long-drawn, deep breath. His pipe had gone out and he leaned forward, picking up a blazing bit of dry pine which he held to the blackened bowl. Dick Farley noticed that the bronzed, lined face was very calm, the eyes somewhat wider opened than usual, the fingers upon the fagot as steady as should be the fingers of a man without nerves.

"Johnny—" Farley was speaking at last, with an effort, keeping his tones as steady as his partner's—"you are right when you say that there are some things which we can't explain. But it's up to us to explain what we can, isn't it? You haven't thought of those men for a long time, and now they flash up before you all of a sudden, and clear. Can't it be that I have happened to use some expression that Ben used, or that some sound from the woods about us, or some smell or even an odd color in the sunset——"

"That's like you, Dickie. Fight until you're in the last ditch, and then go on fighting!" Watson shook his head. "No, that ain't the right explanation this trip. I've seen them three men today. I've seen Flash DeVine jerk up his head with

a little funny sort of twist to the left like he always used to, and I've seen the red spot by Parker's ear. I'd clean forgot them little things, Dick. No, pard'. There's no use trying to explain. I got to thinking about it this noon while you was staking out the horses, and I made a little drawing you can use if I pass out before we get to the place. It's on a cigareet paper, and I poked it inside old Shaggy's saddle-blanket. And now, boy—" standing up, his shoulders lifted and squared—"good night. If it happens I don't see you any more——"

He put out his hand suddenly. Young Dick Farley gulped down a lump in his throat as he gripped Johnny Watson's fingers. For a moment they stared into each other's eyes—then Watson turned away abruptly and with no other word went to his blankets.

CHAPTER II

FORWARD

IT WAS Johnny Watson's voice swearing at old Shaggy that awoke Dick Farley in the early dawn. Farley stared upward through the still tree-tops at the gray morning, his mind groping for the unpleasant something of last night. And when he remembered he smiled, thinking how he would chaff his partner about his night fears and his dead men.

But when he caught a swift glimpse of the deep-set eyes under the shaggy gray-sprinkled brows, the bantering remarks which were trooping to the end of his tongue were left unuttered. In a blind sort of way he realized that the thing which had come upon Johnny Watson yesterday had not left him. Those eyes were looking out upon death calmly, expectantly, a bit reluctantly, but not with fear and not with rebellion. Farley said nothing as he turned away and went down into the creek-bed to wash his hands and face.

Over their breakfast of coffee, bacon and flapjacks the two men talked lightly of this and that, with no mention of last night. When Watson had finished he began speaking of the day's work into the cañon. He told briefly where they would leave the creek in three or four hours, where they would find water for the noon camp, where more water and grass for the evening camp.

"Tonight—we ought to be there by six—we get over the ridge and into the Devil's Pocket country. There's just one way to get out of that country, Dick, and that's the way we're going in. If a man looks for a short cut, if he goes skallyhooting east or west, north or south of the place where our trail is going to cut into the basin there, he's a goner.

"If you leave this trail on the way back you're going to run out of water first thing, and your horse is going to break his leg, if it ain't his neck, the next thing; and then you die because you can't pick up another water-hole. I was in that country more'n a dozen years ago. There was three of us. Me being lucky in them days, I got out. The others didn't. And I ain't never been back until I took a whirl at it last month."

The morning sun had not yet peeped down into the steep-walled ravine in which their course lay when the two men led their pack-horses out of its shadows, along the higher bank upon the right, and upon the little bench land there. They moved swiftly, with long swinging strides, and as Watson had said, within three or four hours they left the creek entirely, moved eastward through a cut in the mountains which rose steeply against them, and found what might once have been a trail.

Conversation had died. Watson was in the lead, at times hidden from his companion a hundred yards in advance. Then came the two horses. And in the rear, his brain leaping from the talk of last night to Watson's accounts of the place where "the whole side of the mountain was rotten with gold," to wondering about this Devil's Pocket, Dick Farley followed silently.

They camped a little at noon by a spring which Watson had marked upon his map, and rested for a couple of hours. The older man, unostentatiously and without effort at concealment, unlimbered the two heavy revolvers at his belt and looked to them as a man does when he expects he will use them.

"The cards ain't played yet, Dick," he said. "And if it don't come too onexpected, we're going to give 'em a run for their money, old timer."

During the silent hours of the afternoon Farley strove to keep his partner always in sight, hurrying up the lagging horses, keeping them at Watson's heels. And, although he still told himself that he did not and would not believe in this senseless superstition, he carried all day a forty-five-caliber Colt.

ALL day they drove steadily into the mountains. For ahead of them was the thing which had called to them across the miles of wilderness, which, since the world was young, had drawn men into hardship, exile and often enough to death—soft, yellow, crumbling gold! And it was almost eight, and dark in the narrow pass, when Watson called out and Farley pushed by the horses to his side and looked on the site for their camp—"the last camp this side the strike."

It was a spring which bubbled out clear and cold upon a little flat hardly bigger than the barroom at the Eagle Hotel. And oddly, there was no creek flowing from it to mark its whereabouts. For the water ran a scant ten feet westward and sank into a great fissure in the rock.

"We'll eat first," said Watson when the two men had drunk. "The moon'll be up pretty quick. Then I'll show you something—what the Devil's Pocket country looks like."

The day had died slowly. It did not grow dark, for with the rising evening breeze the full moon climbed up through a tangle of fir-tops and barren peaks, its strong white light driving all but the most valiant stars from the sky. Watson knocked the dead ashes out of his pipe and got to his feet.

"Come ahead, Dick. We'll take a look at where we're going. Where a good many men have been—and not many come back."

They climbed from the trail along a spine of rock to a black spire, rising clear of the scanty brush. To the very top of the sloping rock they worked their cautious way until their two gaunt bodies stood outlined against the sky. Here they found footing, and here Watson stood with arm flung out, pointing. Dick Farley was not unused to the thousand moods of the mountain places, and yet as his eyes ran along the pointing arm, and beyond it eagerly, he muttered his startled admiration.

The moon, full, round and yellow, had floated clear of the distant ridges and hung in rich splendor above a long, narrow, twisting valley, the Devil's Pocket. Trees, hills, peaks and ravines stood out in the soft light, black and without detail. The floor of the winding valley took upon itself many shifting shades, a dark silver-gray here where there was a strip of sandy soil, a more somber splotch there where the willows followed a thin thread of a stream.

"There she is!" Watson exclaimed. "That thread of willows marks the only creek in the valley. It runs from a big spring like ours here, and the lake drinks it up. They call the lake 'The Last Drink.' We'll walk fifteen minutes before we get to it. We hit the southeast shore just about where you see that little bay with the cliffs coming down close. There's a trail along the base of them cliffs; we follow that worse'n six miles fu'ther. And when we're there, Dickie boy, we're right on top of the biggest gold-mine——"

His voice broke off sharply, and he turned his back to it all. Dick heard him move back down to the trail. With his eyes filled with the panorama below him Dick's thoughts drew back from the trail and the ore at the end of it and followed the man who had found the thing, the precious thing which they had so long sought, and who had turned back for his partner that he, too, might have his share.

And again he told himself that his fears of last night, which had been growing all day, were groundless, senseless—that Johnny Watson could not be in danger of death.

CHAPTER III

FARLEY MAKES A VOW

BEFORE he climbed down the way Watson had gone, Dick Farley again turned his eyes along the trail which was to lead him tomorrow to the Cup of Gold. His wandering fancies built a golden dream future. Then he turned back and climbed slowly down to the trail.

The fire was dying upon the little rocky ledge where he had built it an hour ago. Beyond the camp-fire, where he had flung his blanket at the base of the cliff, Johnny Watson was already lying. Farley swept up his own blanket from the ground and, stepping around the fire, flung it down close to Watson's.

"I don't believe in your premonitions, pardner," he said with a little laugh. "But if they get one of us they'll have to take two. Here's where I pitch my tent."

Johnny Watson made no answer. He was already asleep. Johnny never wasted time in wakefulness when he had turned in.

Farley straightened out his blankets, jerked off his heavy boots and socks and lay

down, his elbow close to Watson's. And so he went to sleep.

Something awoke him; it might have been the moon, shining full in his face. He rolled over upon his side, shifted his wide-brimmed hat to shield his face from the light, and still he did not go back to sleep. He felt restless, uneasy—inexplicably uneasy. Those confounded things Johnny had said last night wouldn't leave him. There was no sound; not a ripple upon the surface of the night's silence save the murmur and trickle of the water. He should be able to hear the horses—the chain on old Shaggy's halter.

He sat up. Doing so, he put his right hand on the ground beside him, beside Johnny Watson. He felt something damp, spongy, and sticky. He lifted his hand, staring at it in the moonlight. There was a dark stain. He put it to his nostrils.

"Good God!" he cried aloud. "Johnny! Johnny!"

And then when Johnny Watson did not answer, he did not need to look. He knew Johnny Watson was dead—dead at the side of his partner who had slept!

The young man staggered to his feet and stared wildly around. Each rock and tree and bush stood out clearly in the moonlight with its shadow flung out very dark and very distinct. His revolver was rigid in the tense steel of his grip. There was nothing, there was no one. And yet, while he slept, some one had crept upon his partner.

He turned to where Watson lay. And suddenly, as he saw how the man was lying, the way an arm lay at his side, the other arm flung out, the truth came upon him; and without looking at the wound he knew that death had not come upon Watson while the two men lay side by side.

It had come while Farley stood alone upon the top of the cliff staring out into Devil's Pocket, dreaming! For as Watson lay now, so had he lain when Farley came down to him. He had been dead when his partner called to him, saying they would sleep side by side!

"While I was up on the rock," Farley muttered dully, "they got him."

He stooped low over the prostrate body and gently, tenderly, he moved it so that it lay face-up. The moonlight showed well how Johnny Watson's death had found him. At the side of his bared neck was a cut such as a broad-bladed knife would make, a great gash, two inches long. Just one blow had been struck, just one such blow needed.

Farley got slowly to his feet and for a little stood looking down into the dead man's face. And the face of the man who looked into the dead eyes was as oddly quiet and calm.

"They got you, Johnny," Farley was saying in a voice void of expression, "with me in calling distance— Oh, Johnny!"

For a moment he stood, his face sunk into his two brown hands. And then suddenly he whirled about, his head lifted, his arm flung out, shaken with a frenzy of rage.

"My pardner — you've murdered my pardner!" he shouted. "And I'm going to find you out! I'm going to kill you!"

Then he suddenly calmed as he realized that he was alone in the mountains, a week's travel from the nearest mining-camp, alone with his dead partner. He moved back from the ledge and into the shadow, where he sat down upon a broken boulder. All at once a thing which he had forgotten swept back over him—the horses! He had missed the noise of their crunching, he had failed to hear the jingle of old Shaggy's tie-chain!

He sprang to his feet and ran down into the little clearing where they had tied the two pack-animals. They were gone, both gone. He stumbled over one of the pack-saddles with its load. There had been no time to take that. But the other, old Shaggy's saddle, was missing.

Slowly he made his way back to the little ledge where Johnny Watson lay. Again he sat down upon the bit of boulder, and lighting his pipe pulled at it steadily, staring down into the quiet cañon. He could not follow tracks until morning.

WITH the first glint of the new day he buried Johnny Watson.

For a moment Dick stood hat in hand, looking at the little mound of earth which he had made and piled high with stones. And then he turned and, walking swiftly, strode back to the spot where the horses had been staked.

There was no difficulty in picking up the trail. Upon that rugged, rocky mountain-side the murderer, if he had taken the two horses with him, must have moved eastward and into the Devil's Pocket, or in a direction leading southwesterly over the trail which Farley and Watson had come yesterday. He could not have scaled the

cliffs above, he could have made no progress through the dense brush of the deep-cut ravine below.

For a moment Farley hesitated between going forward toward the little mountain valley and turning back. Then the thought came to him that he could hope to learn what he sought to know by going forward, quicker than by swinging back toward the southwest. For if the two horses had gone eastward, it would be easier to pick up their trail than upon the path which they had cut up yesterday. If there should be any fresh tracks leading into the Devil's Pocket, that would settle it. And not ten minutes later, having followed the stony trail until it dipped a little into a bit of soft soil in a hollow, he found the tracks—fresh tracks made by two shod horses.

Then he went back to last night's camp, made himself a small pack of bacon and coffee and flour; and taking no useless thing, no blanket even to interfere with the free swing of his body, he turned east and struck out swiftly.

He followed the trail for a mile, saw how it wound in and out, climbing and dipping, worming slowly toward the pocket. And then, when he had been assured that the two horses were ahead of him, he left the trail and fought his way due east, up the face of a steep bank and to the crest of the bleak mountains. He remembered Watson had told him that following the trail they would have to go a good fifteen miles to travel ten, and now he sought a short-cut to head off the man he followed. He knew that he would pick up the trail again in the valley.

Hour after hour he trudged on, his face whipped by tangled brambles in the cañons, his hands torn by the crags over which he continued to climb toward the top of the ridge.

At last, about the middle of the forenoon, he came to the top of the narrow divide. From an outjutting crag he looked down into the valley before him, seeing again the winding course of the creek, the little lake, the steep mountain walls and gorges. Here he stopped long enough to choose the way he must go to make the best time. And then with one long look back toward the slope where the lone cedar flung its twisted branches over his partner, he turned again eastward and plunged down into the steep cañon, down into the Devil's Pocket.

CHAPTER IV

FARLEY TAKES A TUMBLE

ON THE floor of the Devil's Pocket Dick Farley came upon the trail again as he had foreseen. Where it ran from the ridges across the creek he found tracks. He drank first and then studied them. And slowly there came a frown into his eyes, and then a look of pain.

For there were the tracks of one horse, and of a man's boot-heels in the soft wet soil—tracks a month old, the tracks which Johnny Watson had left when he drew out of the valley to find his partner.

Back and forth Farley moved, stepping slowly by the side of the path, searching long and carefully for the fresh signs to tell him that two horses had passed here during the night or in the early morning. He did not find them. But a moment later, at the very edge of the stream, close to the spot where he had just flung himself down to drink, he found that another man had lain there drinking. He saw the prints of the heavy boots, saw that they had come from the west; that the man had crossed the stream here, stepping over the mere thread of water, and had pushed on toward the northern end of the valley. And the horses?

Dick had no doubt this was the man he sought. For some reason he had left the horses in the hills, hidden in some steep-walled cañon.

Again Farley pushed on, following the trail, seeing now and again the outline of the heavy boots where the soil was moist or dusty. In a little he ceased to look for the tracks, excepting at long intervals, for they led straight ahead, keeping to the path through the wiry grass, straight toward the lake. At noon he stopped to eat and smoke his pipe. And then again he pushed on.

He was tired now, but he gave no respite to the muscles which had been greatly taxed after a night of wakefulness.

Finally, a little after noon, he came to the lake shore, where the trail ran close to the water's edge, and at the base of the cliffs which rose a perpendicular twenty feet here, fifty feet there. And when he had drunk of the clear, cold water and had turned from looking out across the mile of dimpling crystal, mountain fringed, he made a discovery, a discovery which came very close to costing him his life.

Rising straight up through the clear air above the cliffs at his side was a thin wisp of smoke, such as climbs upward from a little camp-fire. His heart beat quickly at sight of it. It was back from the cliffs maybe a quarter of a mile, he judged. There must be a sort of table-land up there. There he would find the man he had followed. He saw that the tracks had come to the lake here ahead of him; that they continued northward along the shore. But again he left them, again to make a short cut, and began working his way up along the cliff-side. Clinging with his fingers to seams and crevices, driving the toes of his boots into the cracks which they could find, he drew painfully, slowly toward the top.

He was already so close to the edge above that he could almost reach it with a hand thrust up as far as he could reach, with fifteen feet between him and the ground below. He was straining every muscle, his face tight-pressed to the rocks, reaching up for the rough hand-hold which just defied him, when he was startled by a sound coming clearly to him from below—the unmistakable sound of the dip of a paddle.

He saw the trap he had blundered into. As he was, he could not turn, could not draw a gun from his belt. There he was, clinging to the face of the cliff, a mark to be seen from across the lake, with no hope of being overseen by the man who in a moment would drive a canoe around the rocky point a few yards away, who could shoot him in the back as easily as lift a finger.

Again he strained upward, and at last he succeeded in grasping the rock which protruded from the edge above, and drew himself up. Then he heard a cry from below, a cry as of warning; the rock came away in his hand, he clutched wildly to save himself, then plunged headlong, twisting as he fell. As his body had struck he felt a swift-driven pain through his head, and lost consciousness in a black nothingness.

Luckily for him the fall had been broken for he had twisted his body so that a part of his solid weight struck upon his shoulder. For life was still in him, and came back little by little. He tried dizzily to lift his head and could not. But he could turn a little to the side so that he could see the lake. There was the canoe, its paddle floating in the water. And coming toward him . . .

It was all so vague; he was so dizzy, the blackness wavered so like a misty veil in front of his eyes! For a little he would not believe that his mind was clear yet, that he was not wandering. For coming toward him was a girl; a girl clad in rough, coarse cloth, made into a short skirt and sleeveless blouse; a girl whose long braided hair was scarcely a deeper, richer brown than her bronzed cheeks, as brown as an Indian maid, but with great, fearless gray eyes. She came swiftly to his side and dropped down upon her knees, flinging back the thick braid which had brushed across his breast.

"I tried to call, to tell you!" she was saying, her low-toned voice coming to him clearly through the singing in his ears. "Are you very badly hurt?"

He didn't answer at once, but stared up at the fresh, girlish beauty of her, frowning to clear the mist from his eyes, telling himself that it was impossible.

She leaned closer and put her quick light hands upon his head. He felt a little shudder run through them. And then, before he could speak, she sprang up, ran to the lake and came back to him with water in her two hands. She bathed the cut, washed the blood away and, ripping a strip of cloth from the hem of her skirt, tied it about his head in a rude bandage.

"I thought—" he began, groping for words.

"Yes, yes!" she broke in. "You could not know how crumbling, how treacherous to the climber those rocks are up there. I tried to warn you. Are you very much hurt?"

"No, I don't think so," he answered, still frowning. And then, "You—where did you come from?"

She laughed, sitting back from him—her hands clasped about her two knees, her chin tip-tilted, a glimpse of her round throat telling that the bronze and copper of her coloring were not racial, that the slender body was of wonderful white and pink.

"No, you're not badly hurt. Or you wouldn't be wondering about other folks!"

With an effort of will he drew his eyes away from her and turned them out across the lake. He had come to find a man, the man who had killed his partner; and instead, this was what he had found. This Naiad of a creature who was no shy backwoods lass, tongue-tied and blushing, but who looked at him with clear, amused eyes.

Was Johnny Watson wrong about this Devil's Pocket, after all? He had said that few men ever came into it; that they never came back; that they never lived here. Then how came this sparkling, radiant woodland maid here? Where had she come from now in her light canoe? Where was she going? Were there others?

Slowly his eyes came back to her.

"I didn't know any one lived here. I thought——"

"Then what brought you here?" she asked.

"I came looking for—some one."

And then, realizing that this statement contradicted the one he had just made, he said by way of explanation:

"I meant that I did not know that womenfolk ever penetrated so far into the wilderness. Miners, I know, lone prospectors, get into all corners of the earth."

"And womenfolk?" she challenged him. "Are there then any places where men have led that their womenfolk have not followed them?"

He again tried to sit up, but sudden blackness swept upon him and he fell back. The gleam of amusement went as swiftly from her eyes, which were once more deeply womanly, intensely feminine and soft. Her cool hand was upon his forehead, pushing back the tangled hair, smoothing it; and her voice, cooing, tender, came to him like a whisper out of a dream:

"You are hurt, badly hurt! Don't try to move. Just rest; be very still."

Once more she sprang up and ran to the lake shore to bring water in his hat. She wet his forehead, readjusted the bandage and let a little trickle of water run upon his wrists. In a moment he opened his eyes to look up at her, forcing a smile to meet her anxious gaze.

"Can you tell me," she said softly, "where you are hurt? You can't move?"

"I'll try again in a minute. It's my whole side, the right side." He glanced down toward his hand. "I think the wrist is broken. I got it caught under me as I fell. I can't move it."

"It is swollen already," she told him after a brief inspection. "Poor fellow, how it must hurt!"

Then as professionally as a trained nurse might have done it she moved her hand down along his side.

"Where does it hurt most?" she queried, her eyes upon his. "The shoulder, isn't it?"

"Yes. Just a bad bruise, I think."

"I hope so. Now, do you think that after a while, when you have rested a little, you can manage to walk? Just a few feet?"

"Yes. But where'll I walk to?"

"Just to the boat. And I'll take you the rest of the way."

"And the rest of the way?" he asked curiously.

"You are a mighty inquisitive creature for a patient!" she smiled. "Where do you suppose? Home, of course!"

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL FROM THE LAKE

DICK rested for a long time. Then leaning upon the girl's firm shoulder, he got to his feet and moved slowly with her to the boat. When he had sunk in a huddled heap in the narrow craft, his pulses beating wildly, his head whirling, he began to realize he had a great deal besides a scalp wound and a broken wrist to reckon with.

With a swift flash of a glance at his white lips and the little drops upon his forehead, the girl stepped into the boat, took up the paddle and pushed out into the lake. And under her strong hands the canoe shot through the water, headed for the north end of the lake and for a little cove, cliff-bound.

Dick half slept as the canoe sped on and on. Finally he roused as they rounded a rocky point, flashed by a little green cove into which a narrow spray of water fell from the cliffs above, skirted a dense pine grove, and turned suddenly into a second tiny bay, sandy-beached. The canoe, its slender nose thrust into the pebbles and white sand, held there, swaying gently. Before Farley could move, the girl was out, standing in the shallow water, her left hand steadying the boat while her right reached out to help him.

"If you feel strong enough, it's only a little way, and you will rest better."

Ashamed of his weakness in the face of her confident young strength, he got to his feet. Already it was a harder thing for him to stand than it had been ten minutes ago. His right shoulder, side and arm were utterly useless. His leg, when he put a little of his weight upon it, pained him so that with his lip caught sharply between his teeth it

cost him much to keep back a cry of agony.

But in the end, leaning upon her, her arm tight about him, he got into the water and to the strip of sand. Looking anxiously for some sort of camp, he saw ahead only a thick grove of pine and fir like the one they had passed, and the sheer cliffs beyond.

"I think," she was saying to him, "that if you rest again you will only be the stiffer, sorer for it. Can you manage to walk a little further?"

He nodded. And now he staggered on with his guide and into the trees. And when at last she stopped he again looked up, expecting to see the camp. Instead, he saw that they had brought up at the edge of the level strip with the cliff-wall in front of them.

"We're going up there," she answered the puzzled look in his eyes. "It isn't as hard as it looks. Can you go a little further?"

He nodded again painfully. So again they moved on, ten feet along the cliffs, and came, unexpectedly for him, upon a great, gently slanting cut in the rocks, into which bits of stone had been flung so as to make rude, rough steps. It was harder now, slower; for he had to lift his left foot each time, while she helped relieve the weight upon the other, and wearily pull himself up. Ten minutes dragged by before they had climbed the twenty feet.

Upon the top was a plateau perhaps a mile long, broken with trees and boulders, five hundred yards wide. The fringe of trees and ragged cliffs upon the side toward the lake hid the table-land completely from that direction. And, set between two gnarled cedars, at the very edge of a dense bit of the forest where it ran out from the sea of verdure like a cape, was a low, rambling log cabin, a thin spiral of smoke winding up from its stone chimney. Here was "home."

The cabin had all the signs of age, discolored by many Winters, a vine a dozen years old climbing over it. And Johnny Watson, who had known the Devil's Pocket for a quarter of a century, had said that no man ever lived here!

But Dick Farley was in little mood for speculation. He stumbled on, conscious only of the dizzy nausea which drove even the pain of his hurt side into a dim, faraway background. After an endless groping through a thickening fog he knew that they had stepped from the sunlight into the shade; felt rough boards under his boots; felt that two arms, not just one, were tight around his body; knew with a grateful, long-drawn sobbing breath that he was lying upon blankets.

It was dusk in the cabin—twilight fragrant with the spicy odors dropping down from the grove—when he found himself at first groping for reality in a confused chaos of emotions and then gradually coming to full understanding. It was a great, low-walled room, a rectangle of light marking the door, two squares showing him the windows and a deep-mouthed fireplace crackling with a newly lighted fire.

Across the room from his bunk were a heavy little table and rough chair. His eyes went slowly to the floor—over the squared saplings which went to make it, across a bearskin, and to another door, smaller, lower than the other, leading into another room. He tried to lift himself upon his elbow, and fell back stabbed by the sharp pain in his shoulder. And then he turned his head quickly toward the narrow door. Then he had heard a step.

She came swiftly to him, looking down at him with her great eyes filled with concern. When she saw the look in his she smiled, and sitting down upon the edge of his bed put her hand upon his forehead.

"You are better," her rich voice was saying in a matter-of-fact way. "You're not so feverish, and you know where you are, don't you?"

"Yes. Much better." He called up a twisted smile to meet hers. And then, "I have been an awful nuisance."

"You mustn't say such things——"

But he insisted, looking steadily at her.

"If you hadn't happened along—if you hadn't found me then, or soon—do you know what would have happened to me? If I hadn't died from my fall and exposure, I'd have died pretty soon from starvation. Do you know that?"

"I know," she retorted with great mock severity, "that this is my case; you're my patient, and I'm the doctor and the nurse. And that you're talking, while I believe the proper thing for people who are sick is to lie still. Also, you're not going to die of starvation now. When I heard you stir, I was just making some soup for you. For—I'm the cook, too!"

When she had come back with a smoking bowl of broth, she set the thing down upon the floor for a moment while she insisted on

propping him up with pillows. She shook her head at him when he opened his lips to protest, and thrust a spoonful of the soup between them by way of further silencing him.

"Good?" she demanded, when she had set the empty bowl down on the floor. "And now, do you know I am afraid that I have about reached the end of my medical knowledge! I've forbidden you to talk, and I've fed you some broth. What next?"

"There'll be nothing next. I'm going to be all right soon."

"Of course you are! But we must do something for your poor, hurt side. I have some liniment——"

"Just the thing," he assured her. "I'll give myself a good rubbing——"

"You are very stupid," she frowned at him. "You will do nothing of the sort. I haven't dismissed my case yet, have I, Mr. Man?"

"You're discharged, Miss Girl!" he grinned up at her. "And my other name is Farley—Dick Farley."

"I won't be discharged that way, and my name is Virginia Dalton, and you lie right still, Dick Farley!" she laughed at him.

And when she came back she made him lie upon his left side while she slit his shirt from the shoulder down and bathed the bruised muscles with the stinging oil. The wrist, swollen and ugly, she bandaged with soft white cloth. When she had finished she sat back, flushed but triumphant, and nodded at him approvingly.

With the fire roaring in the deep fireplace, for cheeriness rather than from the need of warmth, with a couple of misshapen, home-made candles upon the mantelpiece, her chair drawn up facing the bunk upon which her guest and patient lay—at her request he was smoking his pipe and enjoying it—Virginia Dalton at last satisfied the man's curiosity as well as she could.

She and her father lived here together, had lived here for fifteen years. He had brought her, a baby of four, into this wilderness with him, had built the cabin, had made this home. Of the world outside she knew little more than she had known when her father brought her here—perhaps less; as even the child's images of men and women and cities, and the things thereof, had been lost in the years. The father had taught her, had brought with them a few books, had been always very dear to her. She did not know why he lived here, away from his kind. He had once, long ago, told her that his health demanded it. Of late they had not mentioned the matter.

"But," she ended, with a flush of eagerness lighting her face, "it's nearly over! We're going to leave soon; go back to the world where people are. Dear old Daddy came in just this afternoon, a little while before I went down to the lake, and I could see right away that something had happened. He didn't say what it was—he doesn't say much at any time; but he told me that he was going out again and might be gone all night; but that when he came back I could get ready to go! Isn't it glorious?"

But Dick, to whom there had come a sudden fear, made no answer, frowning as he lay back staring up at the rough rafters.

CHAPTER VI

VIRGINIA GETS A LETTER

THE night dragged by, bringing little sleep to Dick Farley, and Virginia Dalton's father did not return. It was the longest night Dick had ever known. Hour after hour he sat propped up against the wall, the pillows behind him, and smoked, staring out through the open door at the shadows the moon made. They were deep black shadows, and his spirit was caught in them, strangely troubled. But at last, when the tardy day was breaking, the spark in his pipe-bowl died and he slipped down in his pillows and slept.

When he awoke, the sun was flinging its light through the tree-tops into the cabin. Nature's was a soft mood this morning—smiling, fragrant, audible with many low, harmonious woodland notes. And through the weave of still music, rising suddenly, clearly, sweetly, a girl's voice floated in to him in an old song. He watched the open door expectantly.

In a little while she came in, her voice hushed, walking tiptoe not to wake him, a rod in one hand, a string of lake-trout swinging from the other. Her smile was as gloriously a radiant thing as the morning itself when her eyes met his expectant ones.

"Good morning!" she greeted him, coming to his bedside. "Awake at last, are you? I was afraid I should have to breakfast alone."

"Good morning," he answered, his eyes

filled with the rosy beauty of her glorious youth. "You have been fishing already!"

"I have been down to the lake—for my morning plunge primarily, to tell the truth. And in the second place for something for my sick man to eat. Hungry?"

As she went to set the rod in its place in the corner he looked after her approvingly. Her hair hung as yesterday in two long braids, one flung over her shoulder. Her brown arms were bare from the shoulder.

"Yes," he answered her, "I think I am hungry. While you are starting breakfast I think I'll get up——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she retorted positively. "I'll put a table close to your bunk, and we'll eat here. After breakfast, when the sun is a little higher and it's good and warm, maybe I'll let you try to get up."

As she moved toward the kitchen with her string of fish, he called after her:

"Your father? He hasn't come in yet?"

"No. But we'll look for him before long. Dear old Daddy has dreadfully irregular habits!"

Then he heard her clattering with pots and pans, heard her singing broken snatches of songs; and soon the aroma of coffee and the sizzling of the trout told him that breakfast was ready. She came in then, removed the objects from the table across the room—he saw with a little surprise that they were several books carelessly scattered—pushed the table to his side, dragged her own chair up to it, and brought in the fish and coffee and biscuits with tin cups, tin plates, heavy iron knives, forks and spoons.

"There is no sugar, no butter, no cream," she laughed at him. "But you won't mind, will you?"

While they ate she told him more of herself; how she fished, or used the rifle to bring down a squirrel from a pine, or to get a deer, sometimes; how from her lookout, a peak a mile behind the cabin, she mused over the pale, shifting shades of daybreak or the vivid splashes of color in the west before the dusk came; how she let her eyes go far out to the furthermost rim of the vague, distant mountains and dreamed of the other side—the land of men and women, of cities where the cañons were streets, and the peaks many-storied buildings. She was not lonely because no one had taught her the word, because she had known no existence but this. She did not know unrest, because she had not lived in cities.

"But sometimes," with a sudden wistfulness, "there is something here which talks; and I can't quite understand it!" She pressed her two hands tightly upon her breast. "When I have everything here, how can there be anything lacking? When the world is so big, how can it seem so little? When the day is so filled with good things, how can it seem so empty? When I am so happy, how can I be, all of a sudden, so sad? When I am laughing, why do I want to cry——?"

He told her, too, of his own life; of the schools he had gone to; of his work in cities of the East; of the command to go West for his health as her father had done; of the fever of gold. But he said no word of his partner—he could not speak of that, yet. Nor did he mention the Cup of Gold, saying merely that he had pushed into these mountains, into her valley, prospecting.

"But you said," she reminded him frankly, "that you were looking for some one?"

"Yes," he admitted, turning from her clear eyes to the door. "I will tell you about that some other time."

HE QUESTIONED her about her father; and she, glad to find other ears than the inattentive ones of her woodland friends, spoke unreservedly.

He was a wonderful man, this James Dalton, this "dear old Daddy." A wonderful man to look at: big, mighty of his hands, handsome, a full-bearded giant. With a great tender heart, too, forgetful at all times of self, striving only for his daughter's good and happiness, doing all of the thousand and one little things to please her, to make life run smoothly and brightly for her.

He had filled the long hours with instruction, had taught her to read and write, had read to her from the few books which had come with them into their exile. He had drawn pictures of busy cities with their factories and hotels, their churches and stores, and he had promised her that one day he would take her with him to see these marvelous things with her own eyes.

"And now," she ended, her eyes luminous with the dreamings of a golden fairyland whose gates were to be thrown open to her, "now we are going to see it all, very soon."

She fell suddenly silent, looking beyond the far horizon where her fancies led her.

"It is worth being raised like this," Farley was thinking, "just to be able to walk out into the other life—the life filled with the things man has done. To wander through it a little—and then to come back, to stay."

When all of the chill of the mountain morning had gone, drunk up by the warm, thirsty sun, she allowed her sick man to get up. Farley found that his wrist was more swollen, more painful than it had been last night, but began to hope that there were no bones broken in it, that he had sprained it badly and that in a few days it would mend itself. His right side was very nearly useless to him, the shoulder, lower ribs and leg being sore and stiff; but with a cane which she cut for him from a sapling in the grove he was able to hobble around slowly.

He realized, as he worked his way unsteadily to the door, that it would be many days before he could take up the trail which he had vowed over his dead partner's body to follow until he found its end.

The morning passed, and they had lunch together out under the trees at the edge of the grove. Still Dalton had not come in. But the girl seemed in no way surprised, saying lightly that her father often was gone a day or so without warning, that perhaps he had found and was following the tracks of a bear.

"I am going for my mail," she told him, laughing at his wonder. "Do you feel strong enough to come with me?"

"Mail?" he demanded incredulously.

"Yes! There may be a letter from Daddy. The post-office is over yonder, across the lake. If you think that you can walk down to the canoe, we can paddle over."

With the help of his cane, with the aid of her hand when they came to the rude steps in the cliff side, he finally reached the edge of the lake where they had left the canoe yesterday. Leaving him here for a little, she disappeared into the trees and came back presently, carrying the light boat upon her shoulders.

Helping him to get into it, she pushed out from the shore, jumped in and paddled out into the water, heading straight for the western side a half-mile away. Upon a little beach there, sandy and strewn with white pebbles she grounded the canoe; and with a word to him to wait while she asked for her letter, hurried to a big rock, flat-topped, set back a little from the water's edge.

Turning so that he could see what she did, she tossed toward him five pebbles which she had picked up from the rock. And then she came back to him.

"No letter?" he asked.

"Didn't you see it?" she laughed into his puzzled face. "Of course there was! Daddy has gone over yonder," pointing to the ridge of hills sweeping upward into the westward mountains. "How do I know? Those pebbles were in a row, pointing east and west, with the biggest one at this end, the littlest, our 'pointer,' at the west end. And since there were five pebbles, he means to be gone about five days. No, he didn't add a postscript saying what he was going for. We need sugar, and we need ammunition. Also—" with a little glance, purely feminine, at her skirt—"I shall want a new dress!"

"But," suggested Farley, "there is no town, no camp near enough for him to get those things and be back in five days?"

"He is generally gone longer," she admitted as she got back into the canoe and pushed off. "But it doesn't matter what he went for, does it? You'll have to put up with my sole company for the five days."

CHAPTER VII

AFTER FIVE DAYS

THE days passed swiftly and pleasantly for them—too pleasantly, Dick Farley told himself with something of bitterness. For what right had he to live from day to day in this quiet haven, lured out of himself, out of his black lonesomeness for his partner with that partner not a week dead?

It was true that his bruised side must have kept him in a forced inactivity, that he must have waited even as he was waiting. But he should have spent day and night with his thoughts of "squaring things for poor old Johnny," not in wandering through the woods with a girl.

He told himself, as he lay unsleeping in the quiet night, that he should go; that he should go now that he could drag himself away from her; that he had no right to stay longer. Yet, where should he go? To pick up the trail which he had followed to the margin of the lake, and to follow it—where?

Would it bring him, after miles of winding,

back to the cabin perched upon the tableland? Would he find at the end of that trail James Dalton, her father? Where was Dalton now? Why had he gone away so suddenly? Why had he said to her the other day, the day before Johnny was killed, that at last they could go back into the world which so long ago he had left behind him? Had he killed Johnny Watson? If not he, who then?

If Dalton had killed Watson, then Farley must kill Dalton. There was no other way; there could be no other way. He must kill the father of the girl who had brought him here and cared for him, who had saved him from dying alone and miserable—must kill her "dear old Daddy," whom she loved so much, who had always been so good to her, who was all that she had in the world.

And to stay here made matters worse. To linger on in the home of the man whom, perhaps, he was to kill; to listen to the ingenuous, happy voice of the daughter; to grow to see how wonderful a thing Nature had built of this child of the wildwood; to feel that day by day they were being drawn closer together, that they were crossing a frontier which in a little they could not retrace——

"If her father is the man who did it, have I the right to take her father from her?" he muttered. And again, "Has the man who killed Johnny Watson a right to live?"

So those five days were short days, fleeing so swiftly for man and maid, filled with sunshine and the girl's soft laughter and the vague promise of life. And the nights were long nights for the man; crowded with ugly images, torn with doubts, beset with threats of the future, thronged with questions to which he could find no answer. Now there was nothing to do but to wait.

But there was no waiting, no staying, into the path into which their feet were wandering, Dick Farley's and Virginia Dalton's. It was the old, old story of a man and a maid. And with the first great throb of understanding in the man's heart there came, too, a contraction and a pain, and he tore himself abruptly from the girl's presence and went to stand frowning toward the mountains into which Dalton had gone. And her eyes, following him, were filled with a tender light which was new to them, her lips parted in a half-smile, her breast rising and falling rapidly. For into her heart, too, had come the throb, but not the pain of the knowledge he had.

It was the sixth day. They had been together so much; had talked of self and of the other so frankly; had been so lost to the world and drawn close to each other in the solitude of the still mountains; had come to find a new peace and contentment as they were silent together watching the coming of the dawn, the passing of the day, the slow voyages of the moon through clouds and stars; had been so all-sufficient each to each that the short five days seemed like long, bursting years when they looked back upon them. It was only natural that the thing which was happening with them should happen.

Now, upon the morning of the sixth day, the day which was to bring Dalton home, their talk had died down suddenly. Farley had fallen into an abrupt silence, his eyes refusing to come back to hers. And in a little the girl's mood followed his, and with a faint trouble in her eyes she moved about the cabin, as silent as he. The forenoon passed; they lunched, with now and then a fitful burst of conversation which ended wretchedly, forced and unnatural, and the afternoon wore on. It was nearly dusk when James Dalton came home.

He was a very big man, tall, heavy, broad of shoulder, and very dark; with sharp black eyes under bushy brows, black hair and beard shot with gray. He came upon them from the lake, walking swiftly, his rifle caught up under his arm. The girl was sitting upon the doorstep, Farley upon a rock a few feet away. Dalton's eyes went quickly from the young man to his daughter, very keen, with a glint of surprise in them.

"Daddy!" the girl cried, running to meet him, throwing her two arms about his neck. "So you have finally got tired of roving and have come back, have you?"

He ran an arm about her, and then, with no reply to her bantering, demanded quietly—

"Who is that?"

Farley was on his feet now, missing nothing that the big man said, no gesture he made.

"My name is Farley," he returned for himself. "A miner. I came into this country prospecting. Had a bad fall, and your daughter took care of me."

"Prospecting?" Dalton laughed unpleasantly. "Don't you know, young man, that

this country, every foot of it, has been gone over and over during the last twenty years, and nothing ever found? Prospecting!" He strode by Farley towards the cabin, muttering, "So they come right under our nose and prospect!"

AS HE went, Farley's eager eyes saw the hunting-knife which swung unscabbarded from his belt—a knife more than usually broad-bladed; and his heart sank. Little as he liked the looks of this man, he had prayed that he prove to be innocent of Johnny Watson's blood. At the door Dalton stopped and swung about, looking steadily, deep into Farley's eyes.

"When did you get here?" he asked shortly. "How long have you been here?"

"I came five days ago—the day you left."

"Where did you come from?"

"From the coast. Then from Three Sisters and the Yellow Queen country, where I've been prospecting."

"What brought you in here? Don't you know that this country has been combed over a hundred times—that there is nothing here?"

"I believed," Farley retorted quietly, "that there was gold in these mountains. Since my fall I have not had a chance to get about. So I haven't learned yet that there isn't."

Virginia Dalton had stepped a little from her father's side, and now stood with troubled face looking from one man to the other. There was an atmosphere of distrust, almost of open hostility, and she could not understand.

Dalton turned slowly from Farley to the girl. As he moved the iron rigidity left his face, the cold glint passed from his eyes. It was wonderful how the man's whole expression softened.

"Come here, Virginia," he said gently. "I want to talk with you a little. Mr. Farley," with grave courtesy, "will pardon us?"

Farley bowed. Dalton, with his arm about his daughter, entered the cabin, closing the door behind them, leaving the younger man alone with his doubts, his suspicions, his fears. Their voices came to him, confused, indistinct. He supposed that the father was asking all about this intruder in their quiet Eden; whence he had come, what she knew of him and his purposes.

Finally the door opened and Dalton stood on the threshold looking steadily out at Farley.

"I trust that you will overlook my rather scant courtesy in greeting a guest, Mr. Farley." The tone was open, frank, pleasant. "I am afraid that living a sort of exile in the wilderness so many years has made me forget the social usages. Will you come in for a pipe? We can talk things over."

"I think," Farley replied, his eyes running past the broad form so nearly filling the doorway to the form of the slender girl standing within the room, "that I have already allowed myself to become a nuisance.

"Miss Dalton has been very kind to me. But for her, I imagine, I should never have come so easily out of my accident. Now I am able to be about again, and I think that I'll take up the thing which brought me here. I have some work to do. But—" the two men's eyes meeting again, each studying the other—"I shall see you again before I leave the valley for good. And"—with slow significance—"I shall tell you all about what brought me here before I go next time."

He lifted his hat to the girl, said a brief word of thanks and of good-by, and limped away toward the lake. And his heart was very bitter as he went, and there was little hope in him.

CHAPTER VIII

FARLEY FOLLOWS THE TRAIL

OUT of the few scanty details which seemed to him to have any bearing upon the thing he sought to know, Dick Farley strove to piece together a chain of evidence which his brain could accept as pointing to the guilt or to the innocence of James Dalton. As he drew slowly away from the cabin and toward the cliffs which fell away to the lake, he arranged in mind these things in a sort of logical order:

1. There must have been some strong motive for the killing of his partner. If Dalton's knife driven by Dalton's powerful hand had caused Johnny Watson's death, what motive could have moved Dalton to the act?

This point he considered a long time. It was possible that these two men had known each other years before; that they had been enemies; that revenge had steeled the murderer's arm. But it did not seem probable.

There was something a great deal more likely.

Could it not be that Dalton, although he denied the presence of gold in the valley, had stumbled upon the same streak which Johnny had found a month ago—the Cup of Gold? That he had discovered Johnny's tracks, had foreseen that he would return with pack-horses, and had killed him rather than that an outsider should come into his valley and steal "his" gold? But why, then, had he not killed Johnny's partner as well?

2. The crime had been committed with a knife, unusually broad-bladed. Dalton wore such a knife.

3. Something had made Dalton tell his daughter upon the day of the murder that they were going to leave the Devil's Pocket and go back into the world. What was it? Did it have any bearing on the case? If not, it was one of those odd coincidences which occur sometimes, and Farley did not believe very much in coincidences.

4. The man who had committed the crime had stolen the two horses, and had hidden them somewhere in the mountains to the southwest of the valley. Dalton had gone away into these same mountains and had been gone five days. Why had he gone? He had not had time to reach any of the settlements; he had brought back no sugar, no cloth.

5. Dalton had lived many years in a seclusion which was very like hiding. He looked the part of a man who had never had a sick day in his life. He was not here because the doctors had sent him. He was a man of culture, a man who had traveled and seen much of the world. He loved his daughter. Why, then, had he suffered this long exile? Why had he made her endure it?

These matters rose above other considerations in Farley's mind. And in the end he saw no way of arriving at any kind of certainty until he had gone back to pick up the old trail; until he had found the horses; until he had seen if Dalton's tracks led to them and back from them to the cabin.

He stopped for a moment at the top of the cliffs and turned to look back at the cabin. He saw the girl standing there alone, her eyes following him; saw her hand go up swiftly as he turned to wave to her; remembered what she had done for him; saw again the clean heart and budding woman's soul which she had not thought of hiding, had not known how to hide from him. Lifting his hat to her, he hurried down the cliffs and out of sight.

"It would kill her," he muttered. And then, his eyes grown suddenly hard as he tried to shut her out of his mind: "Never mind, Johnny, old pardner. It's all in the cards, and we'll play it out. If he did it, he'll pay for it!"

But when night came to him in the edge of the mountains and he sat brooding over his camp-fire he could not drive her out of his wandering thoughts. He saw justice on one hand, and loyalty to one's partner; and on the other he saw the face of a girl who was going to be happy, or broken upon her first great sorrow—and it would be his act to decide her life for her. He bowed his head in his two hands, caught powerless in the irony of fate.

For a week Dick Farley sought, almost without rest to body and brain, to work out the puzzle which had been set before him. He had gone almost back to where he had buried Johnny Watson before he found the trail of the two stolen horses. This he had followed away from the valley through narrow cañons, over rocky passes, for two days.

As he had known from his partner's words, there was little water here. He thought more than once that he would be driven back to replenish the bottle he had carried with him. But the man who had driven the horses here had known the country; and following the trail, turning with it north or south of its general course, Farley found enough water in small springs and slender streams to keep the life in him and make his progress possible.

Fortunately the country was filled with small game, the quail, hare, grouse and squirrels having more curiosity than fear, coming close enough for him to kill with his revolvers what he required for food.

He came at last upon the two horses in a small, steep-walled valley set like a cup in the mountains. Here there was much rich, dry grass, and a narrow stream wandering through it. With little trouble he found the pack-saddle where it had been thrown into a clump of manzanitas. Remembering for the first time the map which Johnny had told him was hidden in a saddle-blanket, he found it readily. With a swift, cursory glance at it he put it into his pocket.

"To get the horses where they were left in the main trail," he muttered to himself, "to bring them here, then to go back to the lake would take a man just about five days —the time that Dalton was gone."

It was another point, a further link in the chain; but, like the other links, it was not strong enough to bear the burden of certainty. He must find other tracks—the tracks the man had made when he left the horses here. He must follow them. If they led straight back over the hills to the lake, he would know. And he had little doubt that he would find them, and that they would carry him once more to the Dalton cabin.

AND now came the slowest, the hardest of his work. To follow the trail left by two horses was comparatively simple. To track a man over these mountains, across hard ground and dry gully, was another matter.

It was certain that the man Dalton, or a possible other, had not gone back over the same trail. It was devious, turning aside for steep cañons which a horse could not climb but which a man could, full of many twists and turns. A man on foot would take a shorter way. And until he knew beyond a doubt that that man had been Virginia Dalton's father, he could not tell whether to look upon the eastern edge of the tiny valley for it, upon the western, northern or southern. But believing more and more that the trail would lead toward the east, he looked where he thought to find it.

And in an hour after finding the horses he picked up the other trail—the tracks made by the man who had brought them here. He saw the deep print of a boot-heel in the moist soil along the creek, found another track a few feet farther on, then another—all leading toward the east—toward Devil's Pocket.

A glance at the encircling hills showed him where the tracks must lead, where there was a little nature-made pass, leading over their crests which a man might follow; and he pushed ahead in that direction, positive that he would find the tracks there if there were any loose soil to keep them. He saw readily that he must leave the horses where they were for the present.

It took him another hour to climb up to the gap in the hills. The darkness was coming on, but there was light enough for him to see that the same heavy boots which had left their imprint in the soft dirt by the creek had passed here. He had done a long day's work; his side was paining him again, the night was very near. So he built his fire here and made his bed of fir-boughs.

In the first light of the dawn he breakfasted and moved on once more toward Devil's Pocket. Everywhere underfoot was a thick mat of pine-needles, upon which a man's foot would leave no sign. But the natural pass in which he had camped led straight on and into a cañon upon the other side of the little ridge; and where the soil had sifted down from the cañon sides to lie here and there among the rocks strewing the bottom of the ravine was the imprint of the heavy boots again. Only infrequently stopping to assure himself that he was not going wrong, he made what haste he could back toward the lake. And he had gone perhaps five miles before he came upon a discovery which caused him to stop, frowning, wondering.

He was in a small clearing, sandy-floored. The tracks were here, still leading east. But no longer was there the single trail. Here, plainly outlined, were the prints left by two men. They were side by side, alike fresh, a very few days old.

Farley had just come down a long rocky slope into the clearing, and did not know where the second man's path had met the first. There was little use in going back, in trying to find out. He sat down, filled his pipe and tried to make out the meaning of this new complication. Who was this second man? Where had he come from? Where was he going? Had he been with Dalton, or had he been trailing Dalton, or had Dalton been following him?

In the end he could not see that the new tracks made any great difference. If the trail he was following led on to the lake, to Dalton's cabin, the thing was clear enough.

Down the long slope of the mountainside from the clearing, into the rocky bed of the ravine, the only logical way for a man to follow, and out into a miniature valley below, he continued without looking for the tracks which he knew the hard, broken ground would not show had he looked.

It was two miles before he again found the boot-tracks in a bit of soft soil. And here again had one man, only one man, passed. The other, the second, had evidently turned aside across the rock-strewn

side of the mountain—had gone on his way, prospecting.

CHAPTER IX

FARLEY FINDS HIS MAN

IT WAS very quiet in Dalton's cabin. Were it not for the figures which the flickering firelight found out uncertainly, casting their grotesque wavering shadows upon the floor and wall, one would have said that there was no living thing there.

Dalton sat hunched forward in his chair—his elbows on his knees, his big hands knotted together, his eyes on the coals scattered across the stone hearth. Near the door, standing erect, his eyes upon the still figure, his whole attitude that of a man waiting, was Dick Farley. Now and then he turned his head a little and looked sharply over his shoulder into the darkness outside, as if he feared interruption.

"So," said Dalton after a long silence, no part of his body moving save his lips, his voice without expression. "So you're his pardner. I was afraid so, all along."

"Yes." Farley's answer was as quietly expressionless. "I was his pardner."

Dalton stirred in his chair. Farley's body lost none of its rigid motionlessness, but his hand, the right one, dropped quickly to his hip. Dalton had reached for his pipe, filled it and lighted it with a coal which he picked up in his fingers. Farley's hand remained upon the grip of his revolver.

"I'm sorry, mighty sorry," Dalton went on, without looking up. And then, "Is there anything else you want to say?"

"I guess I've said about all. I came into this country with Johnny—my pardner. We were looking for gold. We were interfering with no man. Johnny is dead, murdered. It wasn't even a fair fight. Who did it? I haven't jumped at conclusions. I probably would if it hadn't been for—" he hesitated a fraction of a second, during which for the first time Dalton glanced up swiftly at him—"for Miss Dalton. I wanted to be sure. I tracked you from one end of the trail to the other, to the cabin here. I think it's pretty clear. So I came here to accuse you of his murder."

It was the first time he had spoken so clearly. But the two men had understood each other without this putting a name to a deed.

"I don't like that word, Farley," Dalton cut in, his voice as expressionless as before, his form as still. "You call him Johnny? Well, men's names change often enough out in this country for us not to quibble. I suppose he's carried a good many [illegible] since I saw him last."

"You knew him? A long time ago?"

"Yes. I hadn't seen him for over fifteen years, until——"

He didn't finish. Instead, he said after a moment:

"And being his pardner, you are going to try to square things for him; to be judge and jury and hangman; to kill the man who killed him? Well, every man is his own court out here, where we are so far beyond the law. And when a man is dead it is up to his pardner. That is the way you feel about it?

"Yes," Dalton laughed mirthlessly. "We are beyond the law here—we are not beyond the reach of justice. Justice—or revenge? It is hard to see one for the other, sometimes! You want to kill me, then?"

"There is no use talking that way, Dalton," Farley frowned. "You have lived here too long; you know too well what is the result of the thing which you have done—you don't deny it?"

"Will it make any difference what I say?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"You are going to try to kill me," Dalton continued. "That won't help your dead friend much, but you'll do it just the same. I have no desire to be killed by you or by any other man. But soon there is going to be another dead man here—you or I? And Virginia! I wonder what she is going to do. That complicates matters, but it doesn't in any great degree alter them, does it? She'll be back from the lake pretty soon. We'd better get this over with, unless you'll listen to a proposition I'm going to make?"

"What is it?"

"That you let me tell you a story. Then that you give over your thoughts of revenge—or justice—for tonight; and that tomorrow or the next day, as soon as I can get things in shape for the girl so that if I am killed she will have a chance with the world, we go out into the woods somewhere and—finish it."

"It can wait," Farley replied, "until tomorrow."

Dalton inclined his head gravely.

"Thank you. Now, if you will listen to my story. Won't you sit down?" Farley dropped to the chair at his side. "I had trouble in Richmond, where our home was. I killed a man. Why, doesn't matter to you. Unfortunately for me, I killed that man in the presence of another who saw the thing done. That other man was your pardner. He hated me as cordially as I hated him. In any court in the world he would have sworn that it was cold-blooded murder, and his word would have hanged me.

"He would have lied when he said it, but he would have sworn it just the same. As it was, I had to run for it. Virginia was a little baby, six months old. Her mother—" his voice growing very hard—"was not strong. She died. I wasn't with her. I was being hounded from one place to the other; and the man who hounded me when the whole thing would have been dropped, the man who was the real murderer of my wife, was the man who made it necessary for me to run before what men call justice. I did go back and get the baby. Then we came here.

"Again and again, as the years rolled around, I got word from the world; each time to hear that what the world had forgotten was not forgotten by the man who was not satisfied in my exile, my loss of all the things which counted. He was still looking for me, he still would stop only when he saw me given over into the hangman's hands. A few days ago I found that he had penetrated into this wilderness. His prospector's outfit did not mislead me. He was looking for me. I was glad of it. I told Virginia that soon we were going back into the world from which we had hidden so many long years. I killed him."

"You murdered him," replied Farley coldly. "If you had given him a chance——"

"How do you know I murdered him? How do you know I didn't give him a chance?"

"The hole in his throat—death came upon him suddenly, unexpectedly. He may have been asleep, even."

"Talking about it doesn't help." Dalton spoke like a man bored with a worn-out topic. "You are going to wait until tomorrow for your—justice? I have some letters I want to write for Virginia to carry with her, I have some instructions to leave her; I have a good deal to do. For, somehow—" he looked up with a strange smile upon the tightened lips— "I imagine that you are going to come out of this alive, and I'm going to come out of it—dead! You'll wait until tomorrow?"

"I'll wait."

Farley got to his feet. Dalton rose with him.

"You'll sleep here tonight?"

"No. I'll sleep outside—not far away," meaningly.

"Oh, I won't run away," laughed Dalton. "Good night!"

Farley made no answer as he backed to the door and stepped swiftly outside. He closed the door behind him, and strode rapidly away into the darkness. Of no mind to sleep, he built a little fire of dead twigs and pine-cones, and sitting upon a fallen log stared into the flames moodily.

HE HAD sat there, motionless, for five minutes when something impelled him to look up. Standing a few feet from him, just without the circle of his firelight, was Virginia Dalton. He rose quickly, took a step forward and stopped. He did not at once speak, waiting for her.

"So you have come back?" she said gently. "I have missed you."

"Yes, I have come back."

"And you found what you wanted to find?"

"I found what I was looking for. I don't know that I wanted to find just that," he ended bitterly.

She came slowly toward him until she stood in the firelight, so near that he could have put out his hand and touched her. He saw the brown arms reflecting the wavering fire, the dark braids, the full, round throat, her eyes even, deep and earnest. And something he glimpsed in their quiet depths sent a quick pain to his heart.

"Yes," she answered as if he had spoken. "I heard. I listened outside. I heard every word." She broke off, only her hands clasping each other tightly showing him that the calmness of her still figure was forced over a tumult within. "And so," she barely whispered after a little, "you have come back to kill dear old Daddy!"

He moved back, away from her, back from the quiet misery in her eyes, making no answer. And she came with him, step

by step until he had stopped, and put her hand upon his arm.

"You have come back," she repeated in the same lifeless tone, so different from the glad note which he had so often thrill through her voice, "to kill Daddy. Is that it?"

"You heard," he muttered heavily.

"Yes. He killed your pardner." She shivered and the hand upon his arm grew very tense. "So you want to kill him. Will that do any good? It will make me very miserable. It will take my father away from me—all I have. And will it do your pardner any good?"

"Why did you come?" he cried out fiercely. "You don't understand."

"Don't I understand?" She smiled at him—a wistful, wan little smile which hurt him more than if she had cried out aloud. "I understand this much: that in all the world I have but Daddy, and that he has been always so good to me, and that you want to take him away from me!

"I understand that you want to kill him because he killed your pardner, and that it won't do any good for you to kill him; it won't bring your pardner back to life, it won't make him rest any easier. I understand that these things are not for men to do, but for God. God sees better than we can see, and clearer and deeper down into our hearts. And He would not do what you are going to do. He would not take my Daddy away from me."

When he made no answer, finding no answer to make, she stood silent a little, letting her head sink forward despairingly. And then, again lifting her eyes to his, her lips, her chin quivering as she strove to make her faltering voice firm:

"Don't you see that you will make it seem almost as if I had killed him, myself? For if I had not brought you to the cabin you would never have found it, maybe. If I had not thought you were a friend and brought you there, maybe you would not have lived! Don't you see?

"Don't you see?" Again, groaning aloud he had drawn back from her, and she had come to his side once more, had again lain her hand softly upon his arm. "And don't you see something else? We were growing to be such friends, you and I, Dick Farley. Didn't I read right the things which you did not say that day you went away, the things which were in your heart? Didn't you see the things in my heart, too? Didn't you see?"

He felt her hand tremble pitifully [illegible] the anguish written upon her [illegible]

"We were going to be good friends—such good friends! And now"—with a dry sob as she put her face in her two hands and shook from head to foot with the storm in her bosom—"and now you want to end it all, and to kill him!"

For a blind moment he fought hard with the thing which she had thought was friendship. And then, seeing her swaying there, seeing her mute misery, he put out his arms and drew her close to him.

"Friends!" he cried, his voice harsh in her ears, like the voice of a man in anger. "Friends! Can't you see that I love you—love you as a man can not love his friends—as he can love only the one woman in all the world!"

She lifted her face quickly to his, and through the tears glistening upon her cheeks he could see a new look, a look of gladness and of hope.

"Oh!" she whispered, drawing closer in the embrace of his arms. "I am glad! And you won't hurt him now; you can't!"

For a little he held her to him, tightly pressed, as if defying the world to take her away from him. And then slowly his arms loosened and dropped to his side. For again he had seen Johnny Watson's face staring up at him through the faint light of the dawn; again he realized that because she was Dalton's daughter, Dalton was none the less his partner's murderer.

"What is it?" she asked softly. "Isn't it all right now?"

"It is all wrong, Virginia, dear," he said bitterly. "And this only makes it more and more wrong. Don't ask me anything more. Only go back to your father and let me think things over. I—" his voice was hard and steady— "I don't know what is going to happen. I don't think that I am going to kill him. Will you kiss me good night, dear?"

He watched her as she went slowly through the night, watched her as for a moment she stood in the dim rectangle of light made by the open door, and then had only the darkness and the shooting flames of his camp-fire about him.

"Johnny!" he muttered when at last there was but a dead pile of ashes where his fire had been. "If I don't kill him—if

he kills me instead—it will be all right, won't it, Johnny?"

CHAPTER X

JUSTICE

THE day had come, and Dick Farley was firm and calm in his determination. But the thing which the day was to bring need not come yet. There was no call for haste, while there was an urge deep down in his soul to spend this day alone. He turned his back upon the cabin and went, walking rapidly, down to the quiet shore of the lake.

Until now he had scarcely more than glanced at Johnny Watson's map. The Cup of Gold had seemed the small thing which gold is always when come the great, vital issues of life. But now it was different; now he could see a reason in going on over Johnny's trail, in finding the hillside that was "rotten with gold." This was something which must be done before he looked into Dalton's eyes again—for the last time.

A long, curving line along one side of the brown cigarette paper was marked in painfully small letters, "East Shore." A dotted line marked "Trail" ran along this. "High Cliffs" indicated the spot where Farley had attempted to climb up to the plateau, where he had fallen. The dotted line ran on by this, close to the lake shore, and was marked "2 mile." Then there was a little triangle with the words "Big White Rock." Here the dotted line swerved at right angles —to the east—"200 paces." Here was the word, "Cañon." That was all upon one side of the paper. Upon the other, written lightly was:

"Enter mouth cañon. Go straight about five hundred yards. Climb dead pine-tree leaning against east bank. Straight up to top of ridge. Follow ledge to cliff. Look along bottom of cliff." And that was all.

Farley put the paper again in his pocket and turned north along the lake shore. He had perhaps two miles and a half, maybe three miles, to go, and he was growing anxious to see this mine which his partner had discovered.

It was a simple matter to follow the trail, a natural path at the lake's edge, kept open by the deer and other woodland animals that came down to drink or browse upon the long grass here. And before he had covered more than half of the two miles he saw the "big white rock" which Johnny had marked for him, close to the water, rising straight up from the level floor of the valley.

Here, with a glance at his map to make sure that he was right, he turned eastward, counting his steps. He had stepped off one hundred and twenty-five when he stopped, frowning. For nowhere were the mountains far from the lake, and already he had entered a cañon. And Johnny's map had said two hundred paces.

"Johnny wouldn't make a mistake like that," he told himself.

And, again counting, he moved on and into the cañon until he had counted another seventy-five paces. Then he understood.

Here, cut into the wall of this cañon, was a second, a narrower, steeper-walled ravine, evidently the one Johnny had had in mind when he said, "Enter mouth of cañon." The general trend of this one was north and south. He pushed on into it, estimating roughly the five hundred yards.

And then, with a little quickening of the pulses, he saw the dead pine-tree. It had fallen, and now, with its roots half torn out of the rocky soil, lay sprawled against the eastern bank of the cañon at an angle of about forty-five degrees. The banks here were so steep, rising fifty feet above him, that a man would have had a hard time climbing them. But the fallen tree was at once a pointer to the Cup of Gold and a ladder to reach it.

Up on the top of the bank he found the ridge, and working his way slowly along that he came to the long line of cliffs which standing above made the side of the mountain look like a giant's stairway. And now, his heart beating with the exertion of the struggle upward and with the eagerness of quickened anticipation which comes to the miner at a time like this, no matter what face the day wears, he stopped and let his eyes rove along the bottom of the cliff.

And in a moment he saw what he looked for, and hurried forward. There were the marks of a pick in the crumbling bank, and there——

"Poor Johnny!" he muttered. "Poor old Johnny! To feel his pick sink into this, to have it in his hands—and never to really work the greatest mine this country ever saw!"

For here, showing so that a novice must have seen and known and understood the glittering promise of it, was a great vein of gold laid bare against the bottom of the cliff-side, where last year's snows had set the rocks free above; where the side of the cliff had fallen outward disclosing the thing which the mountains had hidden so well and so long.

It was as rich as any pocket the miner had ever seen—richer. And it was not a pocket at all, but a wide, deep vein which ran back into the mountainside; which would make not one man, but hundreds of men, rich, would give them riotous days and wild nights, would bring to the realization of dreams long dreamed. And Johnny Watson, the man who had found this, who had turned back with but a handful of the precious stuff that he might bring his partner with him, was dead and would never take out a nugget.

"All in the cards, Johnny," he mused bitterly. "And the cards are running wrong for you and me."

He sat upon a boulder, his eyes brooding over the yellow promise, his heart heavy with the love for a lost partner and the newer love for a woman who was to be lost as soon as he had found her. The shadows drew back from him, the sun found him out; and still he sat staring at the thing which promised and mocked.

At last, with the short laugh of a tired man, he got to his feet, stood for a little looking at the smooth cuts a pick had made in the rocky bank, and then, with no further spoken word, with no look behind him, moved slowly away and went back along the ridge, down the pine-tree and to the lake-side.

There he sat down upon the big white rock, and with the stub of a lead-pencil wrote a letter upon the bit of oiled paper in which his pipe tobacco was wrapped.

Virginia, dear, if I am never to see you again—and who knows how a day like this is going to end?—this is to say good-by for me. I think that you knew how much I love you before I told you last night. So I do not need to tell you again. I didn't think that love came this way, so swiftly. I am glad, more glad than you can ever understand, that it has come. You will go back to the world. I want you to be very happy. I am enclosing a little present, a farewell gift. I want it to help make you happy, dear. Good-by.

DICK FARLEY.

AND folding the paper, he put into it Johnny Watson's map. Then he went back along the lake-side and to the cliffs below the cabin, to wait for James Dalton.

He thought that it must be about ten o'clock when at last Dalton came, walking swiftly from the cabin. Farley got to his feet and waited. Neither man spoke until Dalton came within a dozen paces of him and stopped. Then Farley said quietly—

"Ready?"

"Yes."

The man's face showed no emotion, there was none in his steady voice.

"Your revolver is of a smaller caliber than mine," Farley went on in a slow, matter-of-fact tone. "You can have one of my forty-fives, if you want it."

Dalton looked at him curiously.

"Thanks. I don't want it." And then after a short silence in which the two men eyed each other steadily: "There is no other way?"

"No. There can be no other way. I kill you or—you kill me."

"Then," Dalton answered, as if he had expected this, "if I don't come through it you will find a couple of letters in my pocket. Give them to Virginia."

"I have written a note, too," Farley said by way of reply. "It is for her."

With slow, steady fingers he drew a revolver from his holster. For the instant he lost sight of the man in front of him as his eyes went upward along the cliffs and his thoughts ran ahead of them to the cabin and the girl there. The world was unnaturally silent, the pines about them like carvings in jade, without a tremor, the sunlight falling softly about them. The moment was strangely lacking the thrill of excited nerves he had anticipated.

That he and this man were standing so close together, that each held a revolver in his hand, that death was very near, and the world and life and love drawing very far away, did not impress him as he would have said that such a thing would impress him. The whole thing was too big, meant too much, for him to grasp it.

"Virginia may come," Dalton's deep-toned voice startled him. "We had better—hurry."

"Yes," he answered. "We had better hurry."

So they stood facing each other, a gun in

each right hand, the muzzles downward. There was not twenty feet between them.

"We shoot together?" Dalton was asking him.

"Yes. And the signal?"

"Count three. That will do as well as any way. Will you count?"

Farley nodded. And his voice, quiet, low, steady, with regular pauses between the words, said:

"One—two—three!"

The two shots rang out together, like one. And the two men, their faces gone white and tense drawn, stood looking at each other through the slowly lifting smoke. For as he fired, Farley had thrown the muzzle of his gun downward so that the ball plowed through the sand at the feet of Virginia Dalton's father, and Dalton's bullet had winged its way high overhead, seeking the far shore of the lake.

"—— you!" cried Farley shrilly, a red flood of blood in his face as he understood. "Why did you do that? Do you want to be killed, man?"

The man who could have killed him had spared him, the man who had murdered Johnny Watson had stood up courting death and had made no attempt to save himself. And the knowledge only maddened the man who had chosen to die himself at the hand of the man he could not kill—no, not even to "square things" for a dead partner.

"I have killed two men in fair fight in my life," Dalton told him sternly, his own face flushed hotly. "I am not going to kill a third. And I do not choose to be made to look like a fool French dude in a polite duel! Are you going to kill me?"

Farley laughed evilly.

"In fair fight!" he mocked. "To cut the throat out of a man before he had seen you, to sneak up on him in the dark—and you call that fair fight!"

"I gave him his chance! And he took it—not being a fool!"

"A chance!" scoffed Farley, the rising anger within him making him for the second forget that this was her father, his gun raised. "To drive your —— knife through a man's throat—to come at him in the dark——"

"I used no knife, and I came upon him in broad daylight. And I shot the throat out of him, after I got this!"

He threw back his shirt collar and showed a raw wound at the base of his neck. And Dick Farley, suddenly seeing the light of a great hope, dropped his revolver into the sand as he clutched Dalton's arm.

"Don't lie to me," he said in a harsh whisper. For he had remembered those other tracks he had found, and his whole body was shaking with what it might mean to him. "Where did you find him?"

Dalton looked at him curiously, as if upon a madman.

"Over yonder." His arm swung about until his outstretched forefinger pointed toward the west—not the south. "Where he had left two horses in a little hollow. I followed him back——"

"Was he a little man, and stocky?" Farley was crying hoarsely. "Blue-eyed, a little blond mustache——?"

"He was a man six feet in his stockings," Dalton retorted, staring. "Black-haired and blacker-hearted. If he was your pardner——"

"He wasn't my pardner. Don't you see, man?" It came with sudden conviction, with a great gasp of relieved nerves. "You—you came upon the man who killed Johnny! You killed Johnny Watson's murderer!"

And as Dalton stared after him, like a man stunned, Dick Farley was running across the sandy beach and toward the cliffs. For he had seen the slender figure of a girl coming slowly through the trees, and he had a wonderful message of life and hope and love for her.

THE OATH BY THE EARTH

by Gordon McCreagh

Author of "Featuring Morton St. Clair," "The Brass Idol," etc.

"Oh, the East is East, and the West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

"SIXTY-WAN — sebenty-three. Renshawe Sahib to play," sang out the Madrass marker with soulless monotony, and pushed the little ivory pointer along the score-board with the end of the cue-rest.

It was one of the four-handed games so popular in the Planters' Club of Darjiling. Renshawe's partner whooped and praised his maker aloud.

"Oh, Billy!" he yelled. "Look at your position. Our enemy is delivered bound into our hands. Here's the beginning of a twenty break, even for you."

Renshawe tore himself with visible reluctance from his occupation of gazing abstractedly out of the window across the intervening ranges and valleys at the tremendous snow-peaks of the Himalayas, and building dream-castles. Born in the shadow of the great range, where his earliest impressions had been built around the wonderful legends of the hill-people about that mysterious unexplored region, the silent beauty of the everlasting snow-caps had always drawn him with an indefinable desire to go look-see.

He came forward and looked at the lay; then he waved aside the proffered cue-rest and bent over on his toes. He was not tall —only five feet eight—and his great breadth of shoulder made him look even shorter.

"Easy now, with a good follow, and remember you're against the nap," cautioned Crandall, the partner.

Renshawe bent his great shoulders over his cue, grunted an uncompromising "Huh!" of acknowledgment, and carefully followed his instructions.

Then Crandall took the name of the Lord in vain with fluency and point. He further improvised several variations while he strode around the table and tore his hair.

Renshawe smiled cheerfully and said nothing. What he thought nobody could tell.

Nobody ever could tell what Renshawe thought. His face, which wore a habitual smile of cheerful indifference to whatever fate the world might hold in store for him, was otherwise inscrutable, and gave not the least clue to what was going on behind the mask.

What he did for a living was equally a mystery; which, in India, where everybody knows everybody else's most intimate affairs, was unprecedented. They knew, of course, that he had been born in the country, and that he had later been sent "home" to some city which they generalized vaguely as "America" to be educated; and that later again, he had returned and wandered for the last seven years all over the Far East. But what he did, and how he earned his money, of which he always seemed to have a reasonable supply, nobody had ever been able to discover.

And at this, several old dugouts who were exposing their wares in the shape of daughters and nieces and other relatives in the recognized marriage market of the hill sanatorium, were considerably piqued. For in India the first requirement of the business, on which all calculations are based, is, "How much does he make?" And the next, "Is it a pensionable job?"

Mrs. Southerland, who was a walking "Who's Who?" of diabolic memory, and who wrote society notes for the Darjiling *Standard*, lost sleep on account of this engaging young man; for, she reflected, he dressed well, and had plenty of time on his hands—good omens. Further, the crafty old huntress deduced from his apparent silence and diffidence in the presence of women that he would be easy game, and Mrs. Southerland had a daughter on her hands with a figure like six o'clock and a complexion that looked as if the moths had got at it.

Wherefore she conspired with an infatuated subaltern of her string. The man of war proclaimed loudly that this was the simplest thing imaginable. Why, he would confront him and ask him point-blank. And, with the sheet-metal sensibilities of many of his kind, he did.

His colossal vanity lured him to select the club, of all places, as the scene of his discomfiture. With fatuous confidence he tackled Renshawe in the midst of a group who had appealed to him to settle a point of dispute about the best means of hunting mountain-sheep; for somehow people had got into the habit of going to Renshawe for information, and his information was always direct and accurate. The military genius broke in on the conversation with what he considered the psychological force of direct and unexpected attack.

"What's that?" said Renshawe, hardly believing that he had heard aright.

The trained fighting unit repeated—

"We were wondering what you intended to give as your ostensible means of livelihood for the new census, old man, and—er, we——"

"Ah, I see. And you thought you'd ask me? That was extraordinarily clever of you." The same careless smile flitted over the face, but the voice dropped to an even monotone. "I make my livelihood, Duchesne, by attending very carefully and most conscientiously to my business."

Which, of course, was an insult, direct and flagrant; and the officer and gentleman should have properly resented it. But even while his face flushed and a blustering answer rose to his lips the cold, colorless light from the other's eyes, like a reflection from his own beloved snow-peaks, seared into the lieutenant's soul. His eyeglass melted out of his eye, and he withdrew.

Renshawe went on quietly explaining that one of the youngest males is usually posted as a lookout, while the oldest and best head, following some mysterious instinct of self-preservation, nearly always managed to surround himself with females.

This was the man who couldn't play billiards, and whose partner cursed him soulfully while he smiled apologetically.

WAS it Ruskin who remarked, after watching a young man who played an extraordinarily good game, "There is the result of a wasted youth?" Meaning presumably that the same time and perseverance might have been spent to so much better advantage.

Nobody could accuse Renshawe in this respect; his life had been too strenuous. At baseball he was a joke. Cricket, to which the English pray, was of course a sealed book to him. At football he was futile. Tennis, to him, meant a series of terrific smashes that lost countless balls and ruined many rackets.

All the more refined and less profitable games found him wanting; but he could handle a sword like an officer of the Foreign Legion, he could box like an American, he could wrestle with all the skill and cunning of a Jap; and rolling these all into one, he could fight like—well, as little Shannon, a profane but invaluable member of the Secret Service, who had once experienced the joy of witnessing him in action, said, he could fight like ——

But these accomplishments were not of the kind that are usually displayed before an audience of admiring girls; wherefore many of the perspicacious folk among whom he lived regarded Renshawe with something of pity and condescension.

And Renshawe was perfectly well aware of it, and smiled away in complete and glorious indifference to their opinions.

Secret Service — Renshawe's frequent mysterious disappearances led many who knew him to speculate on this as his profession. But others, who knew him better, said no. Renshawe was the kind of turbulent and restless spirit that would never tie itself down to hold a job from any boss—much less the Government of India, which meant many bosses, each with a completely developed idea of his own Heaven-designed magnificence.

And they were right. Yet Secret Service

was as near as one might well get to describing his profession. He was what the Natives call a "Go-Get-It-Man." He accepted commissions to procure anything from an ancient piece of china to a rare orchid or a young rhinoceros.

This repertoire included valuable information, in which connection he had, on several occasions, worked for the Secret Service. But he insisted on working independently, and strictly for results; he refused to cumber his time with tedious reports as to the how and why; he invariably procured what was required and declined to enter into long explanations, much to the inward rage of tape-bound officials. But still it was Renshawe they sent for when their own men failed, and Renshawe took a diabolic delight in treating them all as if they were plain human beings instead of gods, and in conscientiously flouting all prescribed, and therefore reverenced, procedure.

This was the man who cheerfully acquiesced while his partner beat upon his breast and called him a diplodocus, and an abysmal anthropoid. But then his small experience of billiards had been snatched during the infrequent and limited periods between his strenuous expeditions, which he called loafing. He had never been able to loaf long enough to acquire skill in games. Even the present period had reached its limit, and while his partner was still groaning, a servant announced with diffidence that a messenger insisted on seeing the Sahib immediately.

Renshawe excused himself and went out; but the unprecedented occurrence of a native insisting on seeing a white man was so extraordinary that the others followed.

"Now we're going to butt in on Billy's business," shouted one of them boisterously.

Renshawe looked rather annoyed at the intrusion; then he looked at the messenger, and grinned all around to the back of his neck.

"What the devil is he chortling about?" queried the partner.

Renshawe grinned some more, and then turned slowly and addressed the man in the Lepcha dialect. He had recognized the man's tribe at a glance, and he knew that there were only three white men in the world who could speak the language of the aboriginal hill-folk.

"Well, I'll be double ——!" announced the most eager of the interlopers in disgust as he led the way back to the billiard-room. "Boy! I require drink. Peg, bring it. What's yours, you fellows? Renshawe, you're an outcast; we drink alone."

"Well?" inquired Renshawe of the messenger.

"Sahib, there is one down at Bhutia Busti arrived from the north who would speak with thee on a matter of importance, without delay."

"What is the affair, and who is the man who desires me to make this long journey at such short notice?"

"Sahib, the affair I know not; it is secret. And the man is a stranger—from Tibet. His speech shows that he is no Bhutia."

"That seems to me insufficient cause to make so long a journey."

"That is in the Sahib's decision. But the man sent a sign, saying, 'Show this to the white man, and he will come.' "

He groped in his bosom and produced a short stick of some dark wood, about six inches long, and exquisitely carved with Kiang-Hsi characters.

Renshawe did not need to take it into his hand.

"It is sufficient," he said quietly. "I come within the hour."

HE STRODE back to the billiard-room.

"Awfully sorry, you fellows," he began. "I must beg off the rest of the game. It's a matter of business which calls me to Bhutia Busti. I'll finish the match tonight if you don't mind waiting."

"Tonight! Hear him! Why man, there's no horse in Darjiling that can take you down to the Bhutia village and back by tonight."

"I know it; an' I ain' a goin' to ride no hawse. My go walkee, walkee. But I'll have to hurry. So long; reserve the table for after dinner. I'll surely be back and help Crandall lose his money."

He strode out, full of energy and vitality as a storage battery, singing, *"Chul mera burria Tum-muka-too,"* which is a lewd song of the bazaars, to the huge delight of the club porter. But the significance of the song was lost on the white men, who merely grunted and called for more refreshment.

"If he gets back by tonight," announced Topleigh, "I'll eat the cloth off the oldest

table in the club. It's twelve miles and a drop of over five thousand feet."

"And I'll eat a set of snooker balls," supplemented Crandall. "A Pahari might do it, but there's been no European since old Cristensen's time who'd come near it."

But Renshawe never troubled to inquire what other people had done before him; he invariably set out to do his little best, which was, as often as not, just a little better than the other fellow's.

He traveled by the sheer up-and-down *choor-batos* of the hill-folk, and arrived at Bhutia Busti in just one hour and a half.

In the old tumble-down *serai* he found an aged lama just preparing to receive him, for the messenger had arrived only a few minutes before. The old man apologized profusely with infinite courtesy and peered at him through his great tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles. Then:

"*Aie, aie.* Just such a man as I was told," he muttered, and meandered off into a long Buddhist platitude on the virtues of promptness.

"My father, I have need of haste," gently reminded Renshawe.

"Ah, I might have known; such a man is ever in a hurry. It is well. My son, you have seen the sign?"

"Yes, my father. I know it well. It is from the Tesho-Lama at Lhassa, and I came, as you see, with speed."

"Good! The Great One said it would be even so. And he bade me remind you of a certain promise and say that the time was now come when you could receive back your word by performing a service."

"I hear."

"My son, the matter stands thus. At the time of the great tribulation—" he referred to the recent Tibet Expedition, when, for the first time in history, a foreign force had entered the Forbidden City — "the Great Buddha with its attendant images was hidden from the eyes of the foreign devils; yet, for our sins in a past existence, it happened that some impious hand discovered the hiding-place and stole away the six lesser images. These, with much labor, we have since been tracing, and in this matter lies the service."

The old man peered narrowly at Renshawe again to observe what effect his speech was having. He might as well have gazed at the Sphinx.

"My father's words have my attention," said Renshawe gravely.

The lama continued:

"The image of silver, my son, which is as prescribed in the attitude of the Oath by the Earth with the great emerald set in the breast, we have followed through many hands till it has lately come into the possession of one Lutf-Ullah, a Dorabi. To him we sent an emissary to obtain the same by purchase; but the man is a man of violence. He slew our messenger, and is now returned to his own country. Therefore, my son——"

He paused with an expressive and inquiring look.

"What is the man's village?" said Renshawe noncommittally.

"Nay, we know not. He is of the Zukkha Khel, and was formerly a Dorabi in the Battery regiment."

Renshawe grunted and muttered, more to himself than to the old man:

"Hm! And the Tesho-Lama wants me to hunt up this cut-throat among his own people across the Afghan border and get the goods? A long quest, my father, and a difficult. Is there no further identification of the man?"

"Nay, my son, that is all. But this we know: the man is tall, having a black beard, and fierce. It is little enough; but the Great One said there was no other in his knowledge who could undertake the matter."

"Hm!" Renshawe grunted again, and sat a long time thinking.

"There is also suitable reward," the old man insinuated.

"I had no thought for that, my father; where the Tesho-Lama is concerned there is no need of bargaining. But this thing needs haste."

"It is indeed so, my son. Lest he sell, and the image be lost again."

"And I await a letter of much importance from my own country, which is not due for at least a week."

He thought a while longer in silence, while the old man watched him anxiously.

At last he arose, and his face showed that he had not a care in the world. The lama rose too, but his face was sorrowful.

"I see that my son has surely put this trouble away from him. The Great One's spirit will be heavy."

But that was only Renshawe's way. Having once come to a decision, his soul was

free from care. Sufficient to the day was the evil thereof.

"Nay, my father," he said. "I start with tomorrow's sun."

The old man gaped with surprise; then he bowed to the ground.

"It is even as the Great One said," he muttered.

THE same evening Renshawe fell like a bomb into the club. Not that his coming was noisy; he walked in with the springy silent tread of the jungle-man, but his appearance struck at least three of the members like a Nihilist demonstration.

Renshawe played execrably, but Crandall was too overcome by the shameful knowledge of his indigestible wager to raise a murmur.

"Well, it's good night, and good-by for a while, you fellows," said Renshawe when it was all over, and Crandall had paid his share. "I have to start for the Punjab frontier tomorrow."

"Hear him talk about the Punjab frontier as if it were only a week's journey!"

Renshawe grinned.

"And say, I wish you'd tell the clerk to hold all mail till I come back; I don't want it chasing all over the country after me and never finding me. Don't forget; this is important, now."

And the letter that Renshawe was so exercised about? That leads back to a year ago; and, of course, to a girl.

Renshawe had accumulated enough savings to take a trip home and visit his people; and there he had met the most wonderful girl in all the world, and, after the manner of strong men who have found but little time to cultivate women, he wondered how she had escaped from Heaven, and poured out seven years of pent-up devotion at her feet. He was a new type in her microscopic orbit, this clean-cut man of swift decision; and she had proceeded with alacrity to add his scalp to her collection. Then, another man had come. Scalps, the exact counterpart of his, hung at her belt in rows, for she was very beautiful. There was nothing new about him. *But*—he possessed a motor-car; which, of course, made decision a matter of much difficulty.

Hitherto the most wonderful girl had found no trouble in controlling a many-stringed bow with neatness and despatch; but Renshawe was not of those lesser animals that are content to hunt in packs. His nature was too big to crave the support or tolerate the presence of others on his trails. Wherefore, since he was a product of centuries of Western civilization, and very much a man, he did not fall upon his rival and rend him with his teeth; but instead proposed very gently to the girl that, since he had to return to his work shortly in any case, he would give her a year in which to make up her mind, at the end of which time she should write and communicate her decision.

This she promised with tears and soft clinging arms, and many protestations that there was no need—she knew her mind. But the next day she went for an automobile ride just the same—West is West.

YAR MAHOMED of the Zukkha Khel clan climbed swiftly up a steep spur of the Sufed Koh range that overhung the Peiwar Kotal pass, and grunted fiercely as he swung his long limbs from crag to crag, leaping, clutching and scrambling as only a born mountaineer can.

Arrived at the summit, he wriggled into a nook well down from the skyline and peered out along the winding track that led through the Kurrum valley over the border into India.

He crouched, all careless of the precipice sheer to the pass at his side, and gazed out under his pent brows like some grim bird of prey. His keen, dark face with its great hooked nose and fierce eyes, and the very posture of his body, bunched forward with the lean neck outstretched, heightened the impression of a great eagle watching for its victim.

The eyes were the most peculiar part of the man—swift and keen, flashing incessantly from point to point. Not by any means shifty or afraid, but the alert eyes of the untamed creature constantly on the lookout for danger and prepared to minimize it by meeting it more than half-way.

After a long and careful scrutiny the grim mouth curled in disgust and the man spat vindictively into the pass below.

"*Thukka-Allah!* The dog delays," he muttered, and his talons curled caressingly around the stock of his rifle, a beautiful weapon which carried its own story.

For a long while he brooded, for all the world like a larger and fiercer edition of

William Tell waiting for his Gessler. Then he spat again and climbed slowly down with the comforting reflection that if Allah willed, tomorrow; or if not, the day after; or the day after that. All time was before him; and, being an Oriental, he was blessed with infinite patience.

Yar Mahomed was by profession a man; and according to the conventions of his race and that part of the world he filled his job very thoroughly. That is to say, he made war upon his neighbors and hated his enemies. In these degenerate times of peace, and since the influence of the British had begun to make itself felt, it was astonishing how far a man of action had to travel to find suitable neighbors.

But whether on the Kurrum border, or down among the Beluchis, or away up in Baltistan, wherever there were wars and rumors of wars, Yar Mahomed arrived sooner or later with his trusty rifle—an older and less satisfactory one; of the present weapon more anon—to enlist his services on whichever side looked like winning; for there would be the most loot. For the rest, he was scrupulously honest, true to his salt, and possessed a very fine conception of his personal honor, an insult to which he would resent with an immediate knife-stroke. A whole man.

The rifle needs special mention to itself; for in that country the rifle is quite half the man. Yar Mahomed had long been dissatisfied with the weapon he had been carrying. It was an old Martini-Henry, acquired in one of the innumerable border-skirmishes with the British, and had supplanted his yet older native-made Jezail. For a long while his heart had been content; but there came a time when he had temporarily hired himself as a guide to a sporting Englishman who had come into the mountains to shoot.

This man possessed a wonderful weapon which would carry true as a hair for a thousand yards, and good enough to be certain of your man for a considerable distance farther; and Yar Mahomed's soul lusted for the beautiful thing. But he had taken the white man's pay, and therefore figuratively eaten his salt, and the rifle with all the other possessions of the white man were sacred.

Yar Mahomed beat his breast and groaned in anguish; and shortly Allah rewarded his honesty. The Englishman was so pleased with his guide in every way that he confided to him that a friend of his, a young lord from England, desired to come on a similar trip, and that he would surely tell his friend to seek out this prince among guides. The friend would be due in Bannu on the British side on such and such a date.

Yar Mahomed went out and prostrated himself many times to the West. Allah was God, Allah was good, *Inshallah!*

I have said that Yar Mahomed was strictly honest; and he was, as was proven in the case of the Englishman. He would have stabbed anybody without hesitation who would have suggested to him that he should steal a horse, or a rupee, or a handful of grain. But rifles and ammunition are the gifts of God to mankind, free as the air they breathe and the water they drink, and as such belong naturally to whoever can acquire them and keep them.

Yar Mahomed praised God for his bounty, and was very sure to make no mistake about eating salt this time. The lordling arrived and went into camp with strange guides, Punjabi Dogras, recommended by the Commissioner. It was child's play. The lordling slept as they sleep whose lives have been spent in perpetual security, and the Dogras were stuffed with unwonted luxury in the neighboring tent—and the moon was flecked with fleeting shadows——

It was, as I have said, a beautiful weapon —a Ballard .303, high velocity, bolt-action; and Allah had further provided two hundred rounds of ammunition.

This was the man who daily climbed the Sufed Koh and perched above the Peiwar Kotal gazing across the valley with hungry eyes.

OF COURSE there was a girl in it, or rather, as they are there designated, a woman. The most wonderful woman in all the world—tall, and straight as a young pine from carrying water-jars on her head. Yar Mahomed went straight to her father and offered forty-five good silver rupees, which was all he possessed.

The old man demurred; the girl was tall and strong, and would be able to extort quite an extensive patch of corn out of the bleak mountain side. Thereupon the ardent young man, with all the impetuosity of a lover, offered his old rifle, the Martini-Henry, which was really worth five or six

girls. The old man snatched at the chance, and the bargain was struck.

Now it happened that there was some small bickering among the Waziri tribes, and thither hastened Yar Mahomed in the hope of acquiring the wherewithal to set up housekeeping. He left the most beautiful embodiment of all the virtues in the care of her father, with many injunctions regarding her safe-keeping; quite forgetful, in his new sense of proprietorship, of the fact that the old man had managed to keep her in perfect safety hitherto. This duty accomplished, he cast care to the winds and hurried away, scenting the battle from afar, with eager, hawk's face and distended nostrils.

Meanwhile a cousin of his own family—a low fellow and a renegade, for he had taken service with the Indian Government—came home on leave and swaggered among the hill villages, twirling his mustache with a military air. And his evil fate brought it about that he, too, saw the woman. He made haste to meet the father, and was apprised of the bargain already struck with Yar Mahomed.

But the cousin was not bound by any foolish tribal conventions of honor; he was an enlightened man, he had traveled afar and seen the ways of the white men. He went direct to the woman and explained how he had many rupees saved up from his pay, and, above all, that he was a servant of the *Sirkar* and would eventually retire on a pension. Can the woman be blamed?

Yar Mahomed returned in due course, but, contrary to the procedure of Western civilization, was not immediately informed by sundry dear friends of the new state of affairs. Across the border, where strife means knife, swift and straight to the mark, those who are wise are very careful to keep out of other people's quarrels, excepting always blood feuds, which are a matter of religious duty.

Wherefore it was some little time before Yar Mahomed discovered what his cousin had done to him; and, since he was the product of centuries of Eastern civilization, and very much a man, he set about seeking his cousin's blood.

But his cousin's leave had expired and he had returned to the protection of the *Sirkar;* and further, Yar Mahomed learned, his regiment had been ordered to a far country, called Tibet.

That was two years ago; and word had now come through other [illegible] that the man was about to return to his own country.

Which explains why Yar Mahomed perched ominously on his pinnacle, shading his eyes under his hand and gazing so intensely across the valley of Kurrum.

On the fourteenth day his patience was rewarded; and he regarded the omen as good, for there were just thirteen little nicks in the stock of his new rifle, and just room for one more before commencing a new line. A speck had appeared in the far distance of the winding track, and long before it came within range Yar Mahomed, with the abnormal vision of the bird he so closely resembled, had made it out to be the man he sought.

He might have dropped him at twelve hundred yards with reasonable certainty by resting his rifle on a rock, and that would have been quite in keeping with the feudist ethics of his people; but Yar Mahomed, as I have said, was by profession a man.

He clambered swiftly down and hid in the pass till he could be reasonably certain that his enemy might not escape. Then he cautiously raised his head above the level of his sheltering rock and yelled:

"Ahoo, Lutf - Ullah, cousin of mine! Greeting!"

Lutf-Ullah dived behind a rock with the speed of a great hairy tarantula which he resembled, and brought his gun to the front before looking to see where the hail came from.

Yar Mahomed shouted like a schoolboy with glee at the surprise he had caused, and called again.

"It is met. It is well met, my cousin, servant of the *Sirkar*, who wouldst have had a pension if thou hadst lived."

Lutf-Ullah's reply was a shot that plowed up the ground twenty yards short. He was a soldier, and therefore no marksman.

He fired three times more while the other waited with cold-blooded alertness. Ammunition is always a scarcity across the border, and Yar Mahomed wanted to make quite certain of his first shot.

He did. As the crashing echoes raced down the overhanging cliffs he coolly blew the smoke from his barrel and strode down the pass. He surveyed the scene grimly and nodded his head with satisfaction.

"A good shot and a clean," he muttered.

Then he took the rifle and cartridges, for they are legitimate loot; and, since Lutf-Ullah had been of his own family, he covered the body with boulders. After which he strode off with the feeling of a man who has accomplished a duty well done.

And when the woman would have turned to him again with the submission of the primitive female to the victor, his eyes flashed, and he spat on the ground and turned his broad shoulders in the uttermost scorn. East is East.

II

"But there is neither East nor West, border nor breed nor birth,
"When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth."

YAR MAHOMED returned to his own village of Munrood to rest up a while. His hands were clean and his conscience was clear, and he was respected of all men, for he had made his honor white. Further, he was a rich man, possessor of two good rifles besides his own, Lutf-Ullah's, and that other, the price of the girl, which he had forcibly recovered from the old man under a machine-gun hail of curses.

He decided that he owed himself a holiday after his weary vigil, and accordingly sprawled his great limbs luxuriously on a string cot while he opened up negotiations to trade the two rifles for the highest he could get over and above their weight in silver, that being the standard price of a good gun across the border.

His soul was full of content, when there dropped a bolt from the blue. News came, with the astonishing mouth-to-mouth telegraph of the East, that a certain white man was making cautious inquiries among the border villages for one Yar Mahomed.

This was disquieting. He had no apprehensions about the affair of Lutf-Ullah, for that had happened on his side of the border; but there had recently been a small matter of replenishing ammunition; and as his rifle took the .303 government cartridge, what more natural than that he should have gone across the border for it? True, it had been but a trifling affair—only twenty rounds, as he indignantly recollected; but these accursed Feringees were apt to make such a fuss over trifles.

He decided that he would go up to Hazwar and lie quiet till the white man went away again. Not that he was the least bit afraid; but the white men had been known to raise all sorts of unpleasant complications by bringing pressure to bear on the *maliks*, or head men.

In due course Renshawe arrived at Munrood and was entertained by the *malik*. His coming had long been expected and every move of his had been reported, but the old man professed the greatest surprise, and gave flowery expression to the honor it was to entertain so distinguished-looking a stranger. Renshawe gravely partook of the proffered meal of greasy kid stew, squatting on the floor opposite his host—who, of course, did not eat—and conversed on the probability of the rainfall, and the possibility of the great Bazid-Khel feud breaking out again, and every imaginable topic except that which was uppermost in his mind. It was not till the hookah had been lit and passed that he mentioned what he had really come for; for this was the custom.

The wily old *malik*, with the hereditary suspicion of ages, fenced carefully.

"Yar Mahomed? Yes, Sahib; such a man did indeed live here, but he is now absent."

"That is unfortunate, for I have journeyed far to have speech with him."

"So? This is indeed evil luck; but a week ago he was here. And is it permissible to inquire what this matter might be? Perhaps a messenger might— It is just possible if Allah wills. But who can say?"

Renshawe had to be careful. There was no means of finding out how much was known about the image.

"Well," he said, "it is this. I would purchase a certain thing that is in his possession, a thing that has come from across the border."

The old man with difficulty restrained a grin. He saw through the whole thing now; this foolish Feringee had given the game away. A certain thing from across the border? Why, of course, that would be his rifle. Such an old affair as that! Truly these white men were persistent!

And, "purchase?" Did the white man think to throw dust in his eyes thus easily? How childish he was! Well, he would send a messenger to try and overtake Yar Mahomed, but there was no great hope; he had gone to Kabul, and he traveled fast.

Renshawe thanked the crafty old patriarch and presently withdrew. He knew he was lying, but one doesn't voice such

crude accusations across the border. However, there were other ways; men could always be found, renegades or fugitives from other tribes, who would exchange information for money.

THAT night Yar Mahomed received a message to the effect that the unbelieving dog was an officer of the Border Police, and that he came for the English lord's rifle. But that Yar Mahomed might rest in peace, for the Feringee was open-faced and foolish, and would accomplish nothing.

But three days later a breathless runner brought news that the Feringee was even then making his way to Hazwar. Yar Mahomed hastily gathered up his gear and moved far up the mountains to Faizkot, leaving information at Hazwar that he had gone west to Rohat. Faizkot was an almost inaccessible mountain village, and he had yet to meet the white man who could follow him in his own mountains.

In a week a rumor came up of a man winnowing the villages above Hazwar. Yar Mahomed cursed gutturally. This Feringee was not as others he had met; he was becoming a nuisance. In the first flush of fierce rage his primal impulse was to lie in wait for him and kill him; but he hesitated at that. The killing of a white man brought certain trouble with the *Sirkar*, and the paying of heavy fines, and perhaps white soldiers quartered in the hill villages; and he knew that his private troubles were not worth all that to the *malika*. He doubled back to Kurrum.

To detail the long chase that ensued would fill a book. Yar Mahomed broke from his more familiar country to the Ghilsai tribes, and from them to the Bazid-Khels. For the first time in his life he was forced to admit a touch of admiration for an unbeliever; and with it a feeling something akin to apprehension crept into his soul, for there was something terrifying about this tireless, silent Nemesis.

Renshawe stuck doggedly to his quest, cruelly handicapped by the universally instinctive union of the colored man against the white. Frequently he lost all trace; the tribesmen lied through long habit, and whether they knew anything about the matter or no, they misdirected him on principle.

But by careful analysis and a judicious use of his keen knowledge of native character he always eventually picked up the trail again. Lately, for a long time, he had not been able to glean any information at all. The man seemed to have disappeared into the air; and this was because Yar Mahomed, recognizing that information as to his whereabouts leaked from the villages, had embarked on a new plan of campaign out on the mountains alone. But Renshawe was nearer to him than he imagined and he became cognizant of the fact with startling unpleasantness.

As Renshawe toiled up a barren slope, doggedly but rather hopelessly, out of the corner of his eye he caught the puff of a thin feather of smoke that flashed out from a far ridge. Instantly he threw himself flat on his face, and at the same instant a thin whine sang over the place where he had stood.

The temptation had been too much for Yar Mahomed. Coming over the spur he had caught sight of his enemy, and the swift access of rage had overcome all other considerations. The fact that he had fired from ambush showed what a demoralizing effect this relentless pursuit was having on his nerves, if such a man could be said to have nerves.

Some inkling of this found its way into Renshawe's mind as he swiftly stalked the spot, for he grinned all over his face for the first time in many days. He considered himself almost at hand-grips now; for, though the spot was empty and there was no trace on the rocky ground, only a few minutes separated him from the man whom he had hitherto been regarding as an elusive fugitive. But the sudden shot woke him up to the fact that he was dealing with a dangerous enemy.

Yar Mahomed, for his part, was thoroughly convinced of the fact. Having once opened hostilities, there would be no more running away—something which his fierce soul had rebelled against from the beginning.

The two men were stalking each other now; yet so many hiding-places did the mountains offer, and so well did each know how to take advantage of them, that it was not till the second evening that they came together.

Honors fell to the white man—white now only by courtesy; for so sunburnt and gaunt was his face from exposure, and so ragged

his khaki shooting-suit, that he might easily have passed for a Gurkha from his own beloved hills.

He was cautiously working down a ridge when his quick eyes, trained to the observation of Nature, noticed a kite wheeling lazily in the sky. He watched it critically; then he rose with a seraphic grin and dropped swiftly down the ravine. Woodsman's deduction had told him that the bird was watching something alive below; alive and active, for it kept its distance. Had the object been sleeping, or perhaps dying, and therefore feeble, it would have swung much lower; had it been dead, the bird would have settled to feed.

He climbed the other side with eager anticipation just crackling out of his eyes. There would be a fight; this man who had given him such a long chase would surely fight; and, though it would have been a genuine shock to realize it, Renshawe reveled heathenishly in a good fight.

He peered carefully over the ridge, and almost shouted. Some two hundred yards farther, from behind an intervening hogback, rose a thin curl of smoke. He ran forward softly, with all the restrained eagerness of a panther following a grazing buck; he hurried, bending low, from rock to rock, craning his neck over each, and taking the craziest chances of making a noise in his eagerness to get over loose ground. But at the hogback caution returned. With infinite weariness he edged up to eye-level, his rifle ready for instant action—and then he boldly stood upright.

A hundred yards further, with his back to him, sat a man with a rifle under his thigh, preparing a meal.

Renshawe's great chest expanded with a deep breath. At last!

HE THRUST his rifle forward and hailed.

"*Ohé*, Yar Mahomed! Yield thee!"

And then, curiously enough, Yar Mahomed acted with the same hereditary instinct that Lutf-Ullah had shown on a very similar occasion. He took a flying dive for cover, and his bullet whizzed past Renshawe's head while he was almost yet in the air.

And some curious impulse common to the type caused Renshawe to throw back his head and shout with laughter at the ungainly figure cut by the tall Afghan.

He lifted his head a trifle incautiously after the outburst, and an immediate bullet cutting his hair showed him that his opponent certainly knew his weapon.

Curiously enough again, Yar Mahomed once more followed the example set by his late cousin. He fired wildly several times. But not from nervousness or fear; he was consumed with wild rage. The fact alone that he was face to face at last with his persecutor was enough to rouse him to fierce indignation; and that he, Yar Mahomed, had been caught by an unbelieving dog of a Feringee was an ineffaceable disgrace. The thought drove him nearly frantic. Also he had heard the laugh following on his first shot, and the knowledge that the accursed Feringee mocked him goaded him beyond all control of himself.

And Renshawe, perfectly cool and alert, held his fire, just as Yar Mahomed had done on that previous occasion.

Presently a dagger-stroke of thought struck through the Afghan's quivering rage with paralyzing force. Ammunition! This was ever a scarcity, and Yar Mahomed's scanty supply had already been much depleted in procuring food during the last month. A swift inspection of the magazine threw him for an instant into a cold sweat, to be followed immediately after by a fresh paroxysm of rabid fury. He had only one cartridge left.

The thought of capture by this accursed Feringee was frenzy. He tried to collect himself to make an end with his last shot. He could do it; he couldn't miss at a hundred yards if only he got a grip of himself. But Yar Mahomed came of a fanatical race; he saw a chance—a poor one; snatched at it, fired wildly—and then went *ghazi*.

Which is akin to *amok*, with the difference that the Ghazi has the Prophet's assurance of certain Paradise if he can but kill one Christian before he dies.

The tension had been too great. Yar Mahomed threw away his rifle and rushed up the slope, frothing at the mouth, blazing red from his eyes, and howling like a chained devil.

Renshawe stepped out to meet him, and without the least flurry brought the sights to bear on his broad chest.

If he had not had such a perfect control of a perfect nerve he might have fired; but as he waited his mind was running freely,

and something out of the centuries of Western civilization came and implanted a vague impression that there was something of an unfair advantage in this. And hand in hand with it came the startling anomaly of a pre-adamite craving to get to grips with the enemy.

Renshawe softly laid down his rifle and drew the wicked Gurkha *kukrie* of his own hills from its sheath with a slow, grim smile that left his lips parted in an expression of fierce eagerness. The joy of battle blazed from his eyes.

Now there was by no means anything of chivalrous foolhardiness in this. It had been demonstrated time and again in the annals of the British army in India that the active little Gurkhas armed with their hacking blade were more than a match, hand to hand, for the big Afghans with their stabbing *Khaibari* knife. Renshawe was certainly carried beyond all resemblance to his normal self by the "fierce joy that warriors feel," or he might never have taken such a chance; but he felt perfect confidence in his own phenomenal quickness and trained muscles against a much bigger and clumsier opponent. And this is the God-given gift to all natural-born fighting-men—the supreme confidence of winning. That is why they are fighting-men.

He stepped forward to a level spot and waited with tense muscles slightly crouched, poised on the balls of his feet, and weaving the terrible curved blade in and out before him.

At any other time even such a man as Yar Mahomed might well have hesitated, and at least fought warily, but he was *ghazi;* he leaped in with a howl and a hissing stab of his great three-foot blade. But Renshawe easily evaded and returned with a swift swing at the stomach after the Gurkha manner.

Yet the long-limbed fanatic was no novice at knife-play. With a lightning recovery he met the blade on his own and whirled up for another slashing stroke.

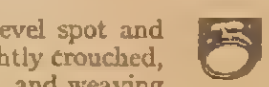
Renshawe stepped swiftly inside the blow so that the man's arm jarred on his shoulder; and at the same time he drove heavily for the neck. And then his heart came up into his mouth where he could taste it, for the blade caught in the huge iron brooch that held the Afghan's sheepskin *poshteen* together at the shoulder, and twisted from his hand.

Yar Mohamed howled aloud with demoniac joy and heaved up his arm for a final stab. Renshawe's mind worked with the speed and accuracy of the well-kept machine that it was. In the second that elapsed between his disastrous stroke and the return he had rejected half a dozen possibilities and seized on the one which would serve him best; and here his jiu-jitsu skill stood him in good stead.

He leaped up at the raised arm, and their hands met with a soft smack. With a peculiar double grip, enclosing hand and hilt, he pressed away the driving stroke that whizzed by his side like a lightning bolt.

Again the same thing happened; and again. Then Renshawe saw his chance and slipped in close, turning his back to his opponent so that the stabbing arm came down over his shoulder. A little farther out, and the elbow would have struck his shoulder, and the swift jerk that he gave would have snapped it like a clay pipe-stem.

As it was, in his anxiety to get well within the blow he had not taken into account the Afghan's great length of limb; the fulcrum of his shoulder caught the upper part of the arm and the snapping wrench only availed to jerk the great knife from the paralyzed fingers.



IT WAS man against man now, breast against breast; trained muscle and phenomenal skill against brute strength and berserk fury. Their sinews cracked as they strained and stamped over the broken ground, working farther and farther down the slope.

Presently the maniac-light began to die out of the Afghan's eyes; the fanatical fury had spent itself, and he began to fight with more cunning, while he marveled at this comparatively small man who stood against him so evenly. As they swung with straining chests and hissing breath the loose stones made foothold impossible, and presently they fell to the ground with interlocked limbs.

There the mad struggle continued. They rolled ever lower and farther, neither gaining any marked advantage, and both growing equally spent.

Then a final heave carried them both over a small declivity, locked in a single clawing mass of venom and fight, which struck with a heavy thud and rolled apart.

Renshawe struggled slowly to his feet,

badly shaken, and stood panting, expecting the other's attack; till he saw, to his immense relief, that the Afghan was evidently as badly jolted as himself, for he made no move to renew the combat.

And then, as they glared with bloodshot eyes and heaving lungs, from a nestling mountain village far below floated the boom of a gong and the clear call of the muezzin.

"*Ella-a-hi ho Allah! Akhbar Alla-a-ah*—God is *the* God! Praise be to God!"

Renshawe smiled painfully. The incongruity of it struck some hidden note of grim humor.

"It is thy time for prayer, O Mussulman—perchance the last. Take it," he advised. He felt that he would be glad of the respite.

The sweating Mohammedan thought the same. As for prayer—well, they were both out of reach of weapons and the white man could take no advantage; he would show him. And forthwith, with superb disdain, he turned his back and faced the west.

"Hear the voice of God!" chanted the muezzin.

And the follower of the Prophet knelt and raised his hands to his ears—and the white man drew in great life-giving drafts of air and thanked his own God for the rest.

When the last note had died away from below, the great Afghan rose gravely and surveyed his enemy with a thoughtful look, tinged with a man's admiration for a man.

"Sahib," he said at length, "what need that we two slay one another?"

"None," answered Renshawe promptly, "if thou wilt but deliver what I seek."

The battle-light began to come back in the other's eyes.

"Give thee my rifle? Nay, it is mine to me, by the law of conquest. My life first."

"Rifle?" muttered Renshawe wonderingly. "What need have I of thy rifle?"

"What matter is it then that thou hast followed me for this month past?"

"The matter of Lutf-Ullah."

"That was across the border," flashed Yar Mahomed hotly. "There is no penalty. It was a feud according to our custom."

"There is no talk of penalty. What have I to do with thy feuds? But the matter is this. Lutf-Ullah had with him a sacred image of the Buddha stolen from Tibet; it is this that I seek."

Yar Mahomed's face flashed again.

"Nay, am I a thief?" he cried indignantly. "If the dog had any image, it is surely with his bones even now."

Renshawe looked into his eyes long and searchingly. Then he nodded slowly.

"True. I should have known," he said. "It is truce between us."

"It is truce," repeated Yar Mahomed. "My heart is glad. We be men, thou and I."

Together they clambered somewhat stiffly up the scene of the late struggle and come to the little camp, and the sight of the preparations reminded Yar Mahomed of his need for a meal and rest.

"The Sahib will eat?" he invited with grave courtesy.

Renshawe signified his willingness, and squatted down and waited while the Afghan kneaded his coarse flour with a little water and salt, and patted the flat unleavened cake between his hands.

When it was roasted in the ashes the Afghan broke the cake in two and handed a half to Renshawe with a curious look in his eyes. Renshawe received it through the smoke of the fire and ate.

Thereafter the Afghan addressed the white man as "Brother."

LATER, he accompanied him to the scene of his blood feud, and showed the piled boulders. Renshawe set to work to remove these with some misgivings. It chilled him to think that perhaps the man had sold before leaving India. But as the bones, already picked clean by the great black ants, were disclosed, there sat the beautifully carved figure of dulled silver in its proper position, with the fingers of the right hand touching the ground in front of the knee in the prescribed attitude of taking the Oath by the Earth; and the great emerald winked up at them in the sunlight from its breast.

"Hm!" grunted Renshawe. "That puts me quits with the Tesho-Lama. Then he looked curiously at Yar Mahomed.

But the great Afghan leaned gaunt and stolid on his rifle. What did he want with images and stones? The dead man's weapon was now his. It was enough.

They parted at the border, after Renshawe had shamelessly promised to send many pounds of .303 cartridges cunningly hidden in kerosene oil-cans, in flagrant defiance of all government regulations and treaties.

In the fulfilment of time he arrived at Darjiling and found his letter. The momentous missive said "Come," but not very enthusiastically. And Renshawe thought for a long time; and curiously enough, the more he thought, the more certain became the gradually forming conviction of the past year that the most wonderful girl was after all not quite so wonderful as she had at first seemed; and he decided to think a little longer—which was a very lucky escape for him.

WELL of which goes to prove conclusively the great truth that there is after all very little difference between two strong men—though they come from the ends of the earth.

STOLEN THUNDER

A Tale of Dawson Days

by Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Making of Louis Lavergne," "The Azoic Law," etc.

"BOYS, boys, throw them cards to Heligoland and come on! It's a new strike!"

To Eric Sark, lounging in the Northern Light saloon, pipe in mouth and one shoulder planted against the wall as he absently viewed the pretentious faro games scattered about in the middle of the place, the words gasped in an excited whisper came faintly through the board partition against which he leaned and which separated the main room from a smaller and private room at the back.

In that private room Sark knew that "Casino" Charlie, "Ante" Baker, "Slim" Sullivan and "Alabama" Ben were sitting in at skylimit poker. Also Sark knew the voice of the man who had rushed in and interrupted them as that of "Gunboat" Kane, and he shot a swift glance at his partner Bassett, to see if Tom had overheard.

Lolling a few feet distant against the same partition, Tom Bassett betrayed his knowledge by no startled movement, but the momentary flash in his eyes told Sark that he was wise. Bassett scrutinized for one keen second the faro players at the tables in the middle of the room, fearful lest they too had overheard, but even as he looked, he realized that his fears were unfounded, that the distance was too great for the faint whisper to carry to them.

His eyes came back to Sark's.

"Eric," he spoke up abruptly, "I've figgered out the drift on that upper-tier claim of ours on Adams Hill. Listen! Here's how we'll work it—or, hold on, I'll draw it for you!"

Producing a pencil, Bassett faced about on the board partition and began to sketch imaginary designs. Sark, standing attentive at his elbow, nodded and sprayed the smoke about. Yet the eyes of neither man were upon the Adams Hill designs. With nice discrimination Tom had selected for his drawings a pair of wide boards with a crack between, and through the crack the partners glimpsed the interior of the private room.

There in the middle of the floor posed Gunboat Kane in tense entreaty, his body bent at the hips, his legs spread wide, one

hand beckoning his four friends to come on, the other hand pointing imperiously through the doorway in the approximate direction of the new strike. And at the poker table, half out of their chairs, with their cards and chips recklessly jumbled together before them, Casino, Ante, Slim and Alabama listened open-mouthed, wide-eyed, to Gunboat's frantic announcement.

"Fresno Creek!" whispered Gunboat, fighting air. "Halpune struck it. Recorded just as the recordin'-office closed, and the news won't be out till mornin'. In Dawson and out again, like a jumpin'-jack, Halpune was, but he stopped long enough to show me samples. Coarse gold, boys, and flat! Savvy that? Four-dollar pans, he says. Savvy that, I say? It's big. It's mountainous big. Come on, you muffled mummies, come on!"

"Hold on, Gunboat," Sark and Bassett heard Casino command. "Don't be fool enough to run out of the Northern Light and down the street. You'll give the whole plagued proposition away. We got to act slow on this but not waste any time in actin'. That's the play. Stroll out, boys, by ones and twos, lightin' pipes and cigars kind of careless as you go. I'll come last, and I'll leave the light burnin' here and turn the key silent in the door. Locked in, you savvy? Everybody'll think that the game's still on. Nobody'll know we're gone till we're staked on Fresno!"

CASINO waved his comrades out, turned up the oil-lamp on the wall so that it blazed brighter and followed through the doorway. In spite of his precautions with the key, Tom and Eric heard it grate in the lock as Casino slipped by the back route out of the Northern Light.

"Thar's whar he fools himself," chuckled Bassett in an undertone. "We know, and we'll sure make urgent use of our knowledge. But foller Casino's cue, Eric, and eschew the dash. Walk funereally slow and whistle the Dead March in Saul. Now," raising his voice incisively and tapping the pseudo designs with an air of finality, "we'll go back to our cabin, pardner, put this on paper and scale out the measurements of the same. What do you say?"

"All right," agreed Sark, casting a last calculating glance at Tom's hieroglyphics. "It looks good to me."

So the two turned down the smoky interior of the Northern Light between the crowded faro, roulette and poker tables, pausing quite naturally here and there to watch for a second the dealers dealing "bank," to note the number of the pocket into which the spinning ivory ball dropped or to see four aces or a royal flush sweep a glutted jack-pot. They passed nods and fleeting jokes with many men of their acquaintance who, for all they knew, might presently be racing at their heels, and finally lounged sedately out of the front doorway.

But once outside in the twilight night of Spring, sedateness utterly vanished, and the partners raced straight for the riverbank.

"We gotta be mighty sprightly, Eric," confided Bassett as they ran. "Fresno Creek ain't very far away from Dawson,—only about fourteen miles or so. If the news gets spread, there'll be one rampant rush. And it won't be a long, survival-of-the-fittest stampede with leather lungs and iron legs winnin' out. It'll be a scrumptious sprint. The hundred-yard man with the spiked soles'll bring home the beans. Pardner, kin you run fourteen miles at one splurge without gettin' spiflication of the system?"

"I can if you can," declared Sark. "But I'd sooner pole it than sprint it. Aren't you going by the Yukon River?"

"Nope, the land trail's shorter. We'll make it rapider. Casino and his bunch is certain strides ahead of us now. That's the way they'll go, sure, down the Yukon, and we'll take a cut-off and beat——"

Bassett did not finish his sentence, for the foremost of five running figures, swinging out of one of the side streets of the waterfront, collided breast to breast with him. Tom staggered sidewise, doing a crawl stroke in the atmosphere to recover his balance and at the same time spouting trenchant phrases denouncing the other's stupidity.

"Shut up, Tom!" admonished Sark. "This is no time to air yourself like that. You've got a bellow like the trump of doom, and you'll rout out all Dawson's living and dead. Shut up, I say!"

"You ain't—got hit!" puffed Tom. "Ask—the other feller—whar's the—fire?"

The other man referred to had likewise recoiled. He came forward again, rubbing his shoulder and breathing strange epigrams, very softly spoken, into the fog.

"I agree with your partner, stranger," he

complained. "You ain't got no call to clamor aloud and make a fuss over an accident. You were runnin' like you might have been biddin' the police good-by yourself. Where in tarnation you both goin' so fast?"

SARK caught something familiar in the tone, and he stepped close to scan the speaker's face and the faces of the other four.

"Hello, Casino!" he greeted. "Hello, Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama! The same salute to you. Where in thunder you going so fast?"

"We were chasin' one of my dogs," explained Casino hastily. "The brute swiped a big chunk of bacon. You seen him?"

"No," returned Eric dryly. "What kind of dog?"

"Malemut," Casino blurted. "A lop-eared malemut with a yellow mane and trace-galls on his flanks."

"Never saw a hair of him," Sark reasserted. "But we'll sure help you find him."

"No, no, don't bother, boys! I got enough help to bag him now. He must have scooted down along the riverbank. We'll just sneak after him till we get him cornered."

"All right, then, but Tom and I'll just amble along behind and see the fun."

"Don't! Don't, I say!" Casino vehemently objected, shaking warning hands. "Don't you do it, boys. You'll stampede the beggar, and we'll never recover our grub."

"Oh, we ain't goin' close enough for that, Casino!" put in Bassett. "We'll stay here at the water's edge and wait while you scout along the bank."

As Tom spoke, he and Eric were persistently following in spite of Casino's gestured refusals of their company.

Casino stopped and stared at them suspiciously. Then he wheeled and ran headlong for the river.

"They're wise!" he yelled at his friends. "Run, men, run!"

After him lurched his four comrades, and after them pounded Sark and Bassett. And as they rushed along they heard the thud of other running feet down Dawson's river streets and along the Yukon bank itself.

"Told you you'd rout out the whole city!" reproached Sark. "Your bellowing's spread the news."

"Huh!" Tom grunted. "As if it wasn't spread before! Ever see a stampede everybody wasn't in on? If they're not in at the head they're in at the tail and squeezin' up the middle. Every man thinks he's the only one as knows. He snickers to himself that he's got a dead-sealed secret padlocked in his lonely breast, but when it comes to the lightin'-out point, they's others at the same stunt, swarms of 'em, jumpin' out of the grass like skeeters in Jooly. Jist look at the roisterin' riverbank thar and see if I'm not right!"

SARK raised his eyes as he sprinted and saw the shore ahead lined with men pulling poling-boats off the muck. Other men were already afloat, moving like phantoms in the haze as they worked their crafts, while beyond these, so far out as to be invisible, the creak of oars and the splash of poles told of more boats in the lead of the race.

"Halpune's a pal of Gunboat's, and he's put Gunboat wise, ain't he?" chuckled Bassett harshly. "O' course, Gunboat thought as he was the only man and that the news wouldn't circulate till mornin'. But how many did Halpune put wise before he graduated Gunboat? Only a few dozen! That ain't many. Oh, no! Wonder if any of 'em's confiscated our boat? Lucky, we are, pardner. Here she is, all splattered and defiled with the mucky mukluks of Casino's bunch clamberin' out over her to launch their own. Yes, that's their boat, that last one. It laid beside ours. But never mind, we'll jist beat 'em acrost for that. Shove her out in their track."

The groove where Casino's craft had been dragged out showed deep and oozy in the mud. Sark and Bassett wiggled their own boat over into it and launched off. It was June high-water on the Yukon, and, swollen with the floods of big tributaries such as the Klondike, the Sixtymile, the Stewart, the White and the Pelly, the river was running strong.

Some of the leading boats could be heard through the haze, speeding down with the swift current towards Fresno Creek, which flowed into the Yukon some fourteen miles below Dawson, but these were ones whose early start assured them time enough to get in on the creek by the water route.

The men in the later-launched boats had no good chance of overtaking the leading

ones, and they apparently knew it. They did not risk everything on the attempt. They were heading across towards the west bank of the Yukon where the trail from Dawson City to Glacier Creek, up in the Sixtymile country, began.

The route by land was shorter than the route by water, and in case Fresno should be staked well up to the head when they arrived, they would not be compelled to waste time traveling the whole creek length before grabbing some ground. This was the plan of the partners, and they could now see that this was the plan of Casino also.

"Give up his dash down-stream!" commented Bassett, staring after Casino's craft which was moving faster than theirs. "Seen thar was too many ahead, and I'll be bludgeoned if he ain't goin' to beat us acrost at that! How's he doin' it, Eric?"

"Oars, I guess," Sark enlightened. "Oars as well as the poles. Our oars, too, Tom, if anybody should float down the river and ask you! I left them in our boat this morning."

"The sartorial skunk! That's Casino for you. If he hadn't 'a' had poles, even, he'd 'a' apologetically appropriated ours, and we could 'a' paddled with our hands. Look at Casino and Company puttin' on speed, hittin' one hundred and thirty-six or tharabouts to the minnit. But jist wait till we thump the trail, Eric. We'll show 'em what a combined cross-country hurdle and obstacle race is. We'll jerk Casino and his crooked cronies along so fast that their heels'll be back on Quebec Creek when their heads is up on Fresno. Go to it, pardner. Put a grouch into your pole!"

"I'm putting all I've got into it," complained Sark, "but this vessel poles like Noah's Ark. She's waterlogged, Tom; that's what makes her drive so hard. I'm afraid we'll have to be getting a new boat this Spring."

"Huh! New boat? What was she but a new boat when I bought her off Durslane in the Fall?"

"But she's waterlogged all the same. You've got eyes, haven't you? Bottom must be punky. The water's nearly up to my ankles here in the bow."

"Yes, and it's over my ankles here in the stern. But I'll swear the bottom was sound when I bought her. Mebbe the sun opened her seams some. Wait till I feel a bit!"

Tom stooped and plunged his arm up to the elbow in the muddy water, scraping his fingers over the boat's bottom.

"Malice aforethought!" he exploded. "Cuts, Eric, ax cuts and a belt-ax by the size of 'em. Thar's some more of Casino!"

"The beggar! Does he want to drown us?"

"Oh, no danger of that! They's just dinky leetle chinks. Not enough to swamp and destroy us, but jist enough to filter in a half-ton of water while we're crossin' and impede us like a boat-load of lead."

"The beggar, I say! We'll move across about as fast as a hearse."

"No we won't either. Pole back, pardner, and we'll git another boat."

THEY dug in their poles with all their strength, brought the boat to a stop and then drove it madly back towards the east bank of the Yukon. The river was a mile wide at this point. The partners were only an eighth of a mile out, and they were not long reaching the shore.

They did not stop to pull up their craft but leaped as soon as it struck the shallows. The water splashed them to the waist, and the mud threatened to mire them completely, yet other boats afloat or in the act of getting afloat from the bank paid them no attention. The minds of the owners took cognizance of nothing but the stampede, so Sark and Bassett floundered out unaided and gained the muck-trampled shore.

"The pernicious parasite!" gritted Sark, anathematizing Casino while he slapped the water from his thighs. "He knew there was no chance of his leading the land race to Fresno if we were in at the start, so he cut off our competition back of the ears and left us cold at the post. We'll never catch him now, Tom."

"Mebbe not," doubted Bassett, squinting wryly at the mist which hid the mile-distant west bank, "but we'll make a tenacious try for it. Stay here till I beg, borrer or steal somethin' that floats!"

Like a wallowing hippopotamus, Tom ploughed down the muddy bank, casting covetous eyes on many a craft whose owners ominously warned him off, until finally he ran into a Swede 'longshoreman disembarking part of the cargo of a grounded river steamer from a boat the size of a scow.

"Here, Ole, I want that boat," Bassett informed. "I'm goin' acrost the Yukon.

Twenty-five dollars is the hire. Hurry up, throw out them boxes and bundles!"

The Swede 'longshoreman who had no interest in stampedes gazed at him ox-like.

"Ay tank, Ay ban batter have fifty," he boosted.

"You usurer! But I'm the goat this trip. I kin't afford to kick. Fifty it is, Ole. Git a twist on. Eric, hey, hustle here! Help us stevedore this stuff."

Out into the mud the boxes and bundles flew in a reckless deluge. The unwieldy boat, the size of a scow, was warped around and poked clear of the shallows. Its long sweeps came into play, and after fifteen minutes of straining and heaving on the part of all three men, the craft reached the farther shore. It rode in on the whirl of an eddy, swung around, stove two small belated poling-boats just about to land, stuck its nose fast in the bank and spilled Sark and Bassett ashore over its bow.

"I dunno how you'll ever git back, Ole, with this flood runnin'," was Tom's farewell. "But if you kin't, why, tail in on the stampede. Yon cargo'll keep all right."

THEIR mishap had lost the partners a great deal of time. The main rush was miles ahead of them. Only the stragglers were here at the rear. But their feet once upon the well-known Glacier Creek trail, Tom and Eric proceeded to make up lost time. In the first two miles they caught and passed a dozen of these stragglers as if they were standing still. After that the partners ran practically alone, and up to the end of the first hour when they crossed the headwaters of Quebec Creek they saw no more stampeders.

"Casino's certainly hikin' 'em along," observed Bassett, as he and Sark paused a few moments at Quebec Creek to breathe themselves. "The bunch is runnin' mighty compact, or we'd 'a' caught a dozen or so of 'em. He knows we're in no ways what you'd call quitters, so he's takin' no chances. He's hittin' only the high spots and never lookin' 'round."

"That's just what we've got to do, too," puffed Sark. "We've covered the first seventy-five yards of your hundred-yard sprint, Tom. The home stretch of the last twenty-five yards is ahead of us now. You got your second wind?"

"Sure! And I'm keepin' my third in my pocket. Go ahead. If we don't tag somebody soon, I'll hang up my racin' mukluks and leave the Klondike trails alone."

Fresh from their brief rest, they dashed on through the dank Spring air. The Glacier Creek trail roughly followed the low divide lying between Swede Creek and the Yukon River. Valleys flooded with hill water stretched away on either hand. Wedges of wild fowl drove over the watery wastes. Flowers, new-sprung from the snows, raised their blossoms by the trail-side, and animal life scurried in the underbrush, but these attributes of Spring did not smite on the consciousness of the men. Their minds were focused on Fresno.

They sped viciously, blindly, reeking in a sweat bath, flinging ridge and valley, bluff and gulch, scrub timber and niggerhead swamp behind. They passed the dwindling upper reaches of another small stream beyond Quebec Creek, and a couple of miles beyond that struck the extreme tip of Fresno.

Now the wisdom of following the land route became apparent, for Fresno Creek, although its main trend was almost due west, curved south before reaching the Glacier Creek trail, paralleled it for some distance and met it half-way back to Quebec Creek. It was as if while the stampede was racing for the creek, the creek was twisting back to meet the stampede.

AS THEY plunged down the Fresno bench-ground at a jarring run, the partners felt the disappointed qualms of the stampeder who arrives too late. Here there was little mist. Fires blazed down all the length of the valley, and fires at the head meant that the creek was located from the mouth up. In the creek itself poling-boats splashed along, and clamor dinned out on the shores.

"Staked to the pearly sky-line, Eric!" groaned Bassett lugubriously. "Thar's the highest claim right below us. Casino, the whelp, put us outa the runnin' with so simple a tool as a belt-ax."

"Yes, and when I find him, Tom, I'll take his belt-ax out of his belt and sink it in his perverted scalp," Sark threatened.

"You'll have some hunt then. He's likely staked down about the mouth, and he'll be back in Dawson recordin' before you git to him. But what's wrong with that geezer below us? What's he punchin' the atmosphere full of holes for?"

"Driving his stakes, isn't he?"

"No. By thunder, he's wavin' on us! That means open ground yet. Quick! Buck-jump it, pardner, or we'll lose out. Some galoot'll roll over the ridge and beat us to it."

In ten-foot leaps the pair bounded down the hillside on to the creek claim of the man who was beckoning them.

"Casino!" barked Sark, glaring at the man's face revealed by the fire's glow.

"Sure! I was scared you wouldn't see or hear me and go past. There's a thousand feet left above me. Kick in sudden, boys. It's the last."

"God bless you, Casino!" sighed Sark. "You benign, repentant beggar. I forgive you, belt-ax and all."

"Oh, you didn't need to worry yourselves hoary-headed over that little stunt!" grinned Casino. "I heard a duffer say once at the Omar Opery in Dawson that all was fair in love and war. I can go him one better and add stampedes. I knew you two had the grit and gumption to lead the land race if I let you. So I didn't let you. Savvy? But poverizin' little good it did me, after all. You see where I'm planted!"

"What happened to you?" asked Tom. "Why ain't you staked away down-creek?"

"You know that northerly feeder of Quebec Creek? Well, what did we do in the mist but take it for a pup of Fresno and go pikin' down her! Lost four miles before we plumped on to our mistake and cut across the ridges. Lost four miles and the chance to stake next Discovery! But there's no use lamentin'. Me and my friends are lucky to get in at all, and you're just as lucky. Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama are below me, and you'd better whack in. Excuse me for not helpin' you, boys, but I can't move off my claim till you get staked, for fear some one jumps it."

"What's your number there?" asked Bassett.

"Twenty-Three Above, it's supposed to be."

"It's Halpune's strike, ain't it?"

"Yes, four-dollar pans! But mebbe that's hot air."

"Where'd Halpune stake?" demanded Sark, driving stakes in the ground next Casino's.

"About half way down. The claims run to Twenty-Four Below at Fresno's mouth, I hear. So you boys must sure be pretty plumb on the truth when you count yours Twenty-Four and Twenty-Five Above. Good luck to you, boys, and glad you got in, even if I did take a swipe at you on the way. That's all in the game. Mebbe next stampede there is I'll be the one to get a jolt from you."

LAUGHING in friendly fashion, Casino, now that his uppermost boundary bordering on Sark's lower one was safe, strode down through the scrub on his claim to hold communication with Ante and Gunboat below him and gather the latest news. Sark went on with his staking, pacing off five hundred feet, which gave the location of his upper stakes and Bassett's lower ones.

"Not such a greedy gink arter all," commented Tom, as they whittled smooth the faces of their corner stakes to receive the numbers. "He might 'a' tried to blanket these two claims. Wonder if the creek'll run rich, Eric?"

"I hardly think it," calculated Sark, "and I'm not banking on it. In the first place I don't for a minute believe that four-dollar pan guff. That's always the cry. Twenty-five cent pans grow into four- and five-dollar pans mighty quick when there's a rush on.

"I don't see Halpune swaggering 'round anywhere. He's a gambler like Casino, and if he'd have struck it that big, he'd be snooping around, up-creek and down, buying all the cheap claims he could get his claws on. And in the second place, if the creek shows up anything in placer, I'll take my oath it'll prove patchy. Fact is, partner, Fresno never did look to me like a placer proposition. What's more, it looks to me just like what it always did. It looks like a quartz proposition. Just cast your eye over that ridge back of us, Tom, and see if it doesn't."

"By thunder, you're right, Eric!" exclaimed Bassett, running a speculative eye over the broken, ragged contour of the ridge. "That's quartz formation sure. The flamelight shows the outcrops. Mebbe we've had all our sprintin' for nothin'."

"Don't know, Tom, but we'll soon see. You 'tend to your corner stake, and we'll sink a hole on the common line of the two claims and prove them up together. It shouldn't take long. By the dip of the creek bank it's shallow bedrock here. I know Fresno. I've prospected it before.

Bedrock's not very deep any place, and just where I stand I'll bet it's not over ten or twelve feet down. You go and finish your staking and then come and help me scrape."

THE Spring rains and floods had left the ground soft and mucky. Sark found little difficulty in sinking a prospect hole with a rude wooden shovel carved out of a willow slab with his hunting-knife. When he was down three feet Bassett came back from the staking and aided him by digging with a long pole used like a crowbar. They went down another three feet, and Eric's wooden shovel gritted into gravel.

"Got it?" asked Tom.

"Yes, I knew it was shallow bed-rock. There must be a fine thick pay-streak hereabouts, that is, if there is any pay in it."

"We'll possess that knowledge in a minnit, pardner. We ain't got any pan to sample, but here, fill my hat."

Tom handed down to Sark a nice, new Stetson, with which he had adorned himself at the coming of Spring, and Eric without qualm or scruple loaded it up with handfuls of the dirty gravel. He shoved the hat up to Tom and clambered out after it, his face and clothes plastered with the sticky overburden. Together they went down to the creek edge. Eric twisted a few dried willow branches into a heap and touched a match to them for a better light than the semi-luminous Yukon night afforded, while Bassett dipped the hat carefully into the shore ripples of the stream.

With a slow, circular motion Tom washed out the light muck so that it floated away, discoloring more deeply the already mired creek water. By degrees he wore down the hatful—the new Stetson bravely upholding its reputation as waterproof—until he had only the desired residue left. Then with a twist of the wrist he flirted the remaining water out and showed up a smattering of black sand speckled with shining yellow grains across the bottom of the hat.

"Thunderation—pay!" ejaculated Sark, as the firelight gleamed on the yellow grains. "Rich pay, Tom!"

"Sure," nodded Bassett, scraping together the little heap of golden particles. "Two dollars, Eric, if they's a speck. A two-dollar pan, bonafide and indisputable. We've got it arter all our doubtin'."

"And I lose, Tom. My judgment's poor. It's something more than a quartz proposition. Wonder if Halpine's sample ran as high?"

"It certainly didn't, or he'd 'a' bin out buyin'. That's our game, Eric. We got a foundation to go on, and we sure gotta clean up the creek. My claim's Twenty-Five Above. Casino says the string runs to Twenty-Four Below at the mouth. That, with Discovery, is fifty claims altogether. We own two already. We'll buy the hull remainin' forty-eight and make twenty-five million dollars in one night."

"But remember it hasn't changed its looks; it still looks quartzy," reminded Sark, his innate caution getting the better of his enthusiasm. "And even if it is all placer, it might prove patchy."

"Pah! Things ain't very patchy whar two-dollar pans is panned first crack. Even if it should be, it'll average up. Look at our two claims! Worth half a million dollars apiece if they're worth an ounce. The other'll average up to that figger on the basis of this hat. If some slump under, others'll produce over.

"Twenty-five million dollars, Eric, is the value of this valley, and we kin buy it for a hundred thousand. Don't the opportunity smite you blind and give you a gone feelin' in the pit of your stomach? It does me. But we gotta shake our nerves together and act abrupt or prices'll go up. I hear Casino and his friends talkin' down yonder now. He's comin' back. He mustn't come on our claim. We must meet him on his own ground. Shuffle yourself and help me dump the muck back into the prospeck hole."

BASSETT crammed his wet Stetson, still containing the gold sample, out of sight into his pocket, kicked the willow smudge into the creek and ran with Sark to the hole. Hastily they shoveled back the overburden, tramped it smoothly down and hurried along the creek limits to meet Casino crossing the boundary of his and Ante's claim.

"Finish stakin', boys?" Casino greeted.

"Yes, all plumb, lines and stakes in plain sight," Bassett told him. "And we also panned a sample."

"Haw! Haw!" laughed Casino. "That's a good one. How'd you get to bed-rock so sudden? Dive?"

"We also panned a sample," repeated

Bassett imperturbably. "I come out flat-footed and tell you so, Casino. But mind, I'm not tellin' you what kind of sample, good or bad. We sampled. Thar's the point. So don't you say in the days to come that we made a secret prospeck and acted underhand without due diffusion of our knowledge. We sampled, I say, and we're out to buy."

"Then take care you don't get stung," cautioned Casino promptly. "I just found out somethin'. Ante tells me the word's come up that Halpune's four-dollar pans contained twenty cents. What do you know about that? I think we're in bad, boys. I wish I'd never started on this stampede. I've blunted my belt-ax on your boat-bottom and jiggled my heart down into my stomach all for nothin'."

"Jist the same, since Eric and me's here, we're takin' a gambler's chance," Tom announced. "We're goin' to buy some claims, in fact every claim that's for sale. Your claim for sale, Casino?"

"Sure, if you want it bad, but don't you make a bluff with me about the creek bein' worth while. I've seen you at the gamblin' game before. I've seen you buy whole creeks that you never sampled at all, dozens of them, and I'd make a blatant bet that you never squared yourselves on any one of them. You haven't had time to sample anyway. And where are your shovels? You sure didn't get a chance to bring them with you. What did you dig your prospect hole with—your hands? What did you pan your sample with—your boot? Bah! You can't bamboozle me. You hadn't a tarnation tool with you. Why, Tom, you haven't even a hat!"

"Never mind that, Casino. What's your claim worth?"

"Well, my friends down there, Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama, just said haphazard that it might be worth fifteen hundred dollars as a suburban lot. Mighty scornful they were of its resident propensities."

"We'll give you twelve hundred," offered Bassett.

"Then I'll take two thousand," grinned Casino cunningly. "Mebbe you fellows know more'n I think. So I'll just play safe. You can have it as I state without me sinkin' shovel in it. Two thousand dollars net!"

And Casino stuck to his figure despite Bassett's haggling until Tom, handicapped by the necessity of quick action, had to yield.

"All right, two thousand it is, but Gunboat, Ante, Alabama and Slim has all got to sell at the same price," stipulated Tom. "They don't boost me no more."

"Oh, two thousand'll tickle them most crazy!" smiled Casino. "I know that by their remarks about suburban properties. They ain't much for the simple life, those guys. I'll just hail Ante to summon them all up."

INSIDE of twenty minutes Sark and Bassett had bought the five claims, and the bills of sale were made over. These bills of sale had a monetary as well as a documentary value and, though scribbled with pencil on scraps of paper, each was sound as a bond and good for two thousand dollars in Dawson City.

Using this same class of currency, the partners then went down the creek on the same mission. The sale of claims Twenty-Three, Twenty-Two, Twenty-One, Twenty and Nineteen Above hastened the sale of the others. It set the pace and the price. By morning the partners had purchased everything in sight, clear to Fresno's mouth.

Halpune was the only man who succeeded in holding them up, but the fact that he finally sold Discovery, a thousand foot claim, and One Below Discovery, which as the discoverer he was privileged by law to locate, for five thousand dollars each, showed Tom and Eric how inflated was the four-dollar pan report. Nevertheless their own two-dollar pan loomed large on their financial horizon, and they cheerfully paid.

"Now," gloated Tom at dawn, "we own the creek. Twenty-five million dollars it's worth, and it cost us only one hundred and two thousand dollars. You're the hardiest member of the firm, Eric, and it's up to you to go to Dawson and record. You kin borrer a boat from some of the vendors and go up the Yukon. I'll borrer another and row back to our claims. I'm tired walkin'. And thar I'll steal an hour's sleep, hire a hand and git through that pay-streak while you're gone. We'll know how thick it is when you come back. You'd better bring Tagish Jim and a dozen or a dozen and a half of the Chilcats with you to prove up the rest of the holdin's. Things'll sure assume gigantic proportions here, and we'll

need that many at the start. Whether we'll need more remains to be seen."

That evening at the hour of dark, although since the endless day was now on the Yukon there was no real dark, Eric Sark poled back up the Fresno on his return trip from Dawson. In his poling-boat, working with him, was the Chilcat foreman, Tagish Jim, and behind in more poling-boats were sixteen more Chilcats, sun-smoked, huge-muscled men, giants of the open, fit engines of toil to tear up the stubborn creek limits and wrest from the golden gravels Bassett's twenty-five million dollars.

The boats were beached on Twenty-Four and Twenty-Five Above. The Chilcats leaped swiftly out and began to kindle a long, oval fire in the fashion they had learned of white men whereon to cook their evening meal. Sark looked around for his partner and discovered him smoking quietly on the edge of the prospect hole which was now enlarged to the proportions of a shaft.

"What depth's bed-rock, Tom?" was his first anxious question.

"Twelve feet," Basset answered.

"Pay-streak's six feet thick, then? How's it panning now?"

"Jist the same."

"Fine! Glad to hear that, partner. I been a little worried, you know. I made something of a discovery in Dawson, a discovery I didn't somehow like, Tom!"

Bassett twisted around on the edge of the shaft, took his pipe from his lips and gazed fixedly at Sark.

"What was it?" he demanded.

"You remember what we heard through the crack in the wall in the Northern Light? We heard Gunboat tell the rest that Halpune had recorded just as the recording-office closed. Today's the twelfth. That was yesterday, the eleventh. Well, the mining records don't say so. I looked when I recorded what we bought, and when I came to get the transfer of Halpune's, I found he had recorded his Discovery and One Below Discovery on the tenth."

"He did, eh?" mused Bassett. "Then that fits in with a discovery I've made myself. I've found out, Eric, that the date on the location notices on every claim we've bought is June the tenth."

"Tarnation, Tom! I was suspicious as soon as I saw it. Only I thought there might have been some mistake. But the date of Halpune's recording and the date on the notices sure can't both be mistakes. There's only one thing that can mean."

"Only one thing, pardner. Them claims was all measured out and staked the day before the stampede started. Casino's the man as did it. You didn't notice anythin' pecooliar about the names of the claim owners did you, when you was gittin' things fixed up?"

"I noticed that they were all Casino's close friends, every hard-bitten beggar of them. That struck me as rather funny, too."

"It was part of the plan, Eric. Casino's worked a colossal come-on, and we fell for it. I'll tell you of another discovery I made while you was gone. I discovered that the claims we staked was salted. Salted on the boundary line jist whar two pardners would nacherally sink their prospeck hole."

"Salted, Tom? But there you're wrong. There you sure touch my pride. No man can sell me ground that's been dug before without me knowing it. I'll take my altar oath that nobody had put shovel into the muck of that prospect hole before mine. I'm always on my guard against that trick. The stuff we panned was there by nature."

"No, it wasn't, neither. It was planted."

"But wouldn't somebody have to dig to plant it?"

"Nope, they tunneled from the river."

"Yes, and it full of water! I guess not!"

"They tunneled before thar was any water," Bassett calmly explained. "Tunneled when it was frozen. Now do you savvy? The pay-streak we struck wasn't no pay-streak at all. It was gravel shoveled in thar and sowed with a few ounces of Fortymile or Sixtymile or Stewart River gold. I've got it all in my pocket, and I know whereof I speak. But if you're anyway doubtful, come and have a look at the shaft."

BASSETT plucked a burning stick from the Chilcats' fire for a torch and lighted the way. He thrust the torch into the open shaft whose black mouth yawned with a twelve-foot yawn, and Eric climbed down on the rude pole ladder, made of a small tree trunk with many limb crotches, to look. At the level of his head he saw what was beyond denial the old workings of a tunnel driven in from the Fresno's bed. The fact that it was so low down suggested that it had been driven

in time of frost, and the settling of the oozing earth, leaving a gap at the tunnel roof, supplied the proof.

"It sure was a pippin of a plan, Tom," admired Eric, climbing out again, "and a well-matured pippin at that."

"Yep," agreed Bassett, "so ripe it was rotten to the core. Casino's some conscientious artist, eh? Jist made one slip. Forgot to date the location notices one day ahead. You see, he must 'a' prepared this salt not long before the ice-run and cooked up the stampede to suit. His game's a lot like checkers, pardner. When the play's through, you kin look back and see the moves you didn't see before.

"Casino chose his ground, chose the man to make the strike and chose the members to compose the rush. Then he had Halpune record, and watched for a chance to spring the discovery stuff on us. If the chance hadn't 'a' come in the Northern Light, it would 'a' come in the Moosehorn or the Polaris, or down by some bushes on the river bank or out behind a bale of goods on the steamer landin', jist wherever we happened to be and opportunities looked good. But the wherever turned out to be the Northern Light.

"Casino knowed blame well whar we was loungin', and he knowed blame well we could hear and see through that crack. Hence the tableau they put on. But it was well acted, Eric, we got to admit that. It makes me laugh when I think of it. It was thunderin' well acted."

"Oh yes, Tom, and so was the collision stunt in the street and the waterlogged boat on the Yukon River! There were no blackflies on that."

"No sir, it was all in the program, a comedy in four acts and I dunno how many scenes. All arranged, even to the two last claims saved for us!"

"Mightn't Casino have got slipped up there? Mightn't a couple of outsiders—for you know there were outsiders vainly tailing in on the stampede—have pounced on that ground?"

"Don't you ever dream it, pardner. No outsider could 'a' got that. Casino and his four pals next him would 'a' shifted the stakes of the five claims so as to blanket that one thousand feet and reserve it till we showed up. Thar's no use prevaricatin' or equivocatin' about it to ourselves. We was the ones destined to buy, and we bravely bought. My respeck for that geezer Casino's increasin' every day, Eric. He's more'n a conscientious artist. He's a deep student of human nature. He was aware of our frailties and our love of lucre. He knowed as sure as the Yukon Summer's back agin that we'd buy the creek if we struck any kind of showin'. He seen us do it many a time, and he knowed we'd do it once too often."

"Well, we've gone and done it once too often," chuckled Sark mirthlessly. "And Casino's pocketed the money. Wonder what he paid each man to run in the salted stampede?"

"Twenty-five dollars and the fun of it," hazarded Tom. "Mebbe fifty dollars at the outside."

"Call it fifty, then. That would be forty-six men to pay, not counting himself. Twenty-three hundred dollars to pay out, and he got one hundred and two thousand in. He's made a haul of only ninety-nine thousand, seven hundred dollars. That's not much, Tom."

"Not much, Eric. And we ain't paid much for them suburban lots. Only the said one hundred and two thousand. That's not what you'd call prodigal. It's only moderate. But listen! The play ain't completed. The checkers is done, all right, and we've lost our last king, but the checkerboard's one as you turn over to play a different game on the other side. It's our throw now. Come back with me on to this precipitous ridge behind our claims. I've still got another discovery I ain't uncovered yet. I wanta show it to you."

TOM stamped out the torch and strode off through the half-gloom. Sark followed him over ragged timber growth and rough boulders up on to the steep of the hill. There Bassett paused, scanning the top of the ridge and feeling with his fingers for one of the prominent outcrops which they both had noticed the night before from the creek limits. He found the place he sought, kicked some dirt away and flashed the flame of a sulphur match upon the rock face.

"Look!" he urged. "You vowed the creek seemed quartzy. What do you thinka that?"

Sark stared through the brief flame-flare, and his eyes strained and became fixed. In the circle of faint illumination there showed

a wide quartz vein, three feet across, its seams plastered with gleaming gold.

"By the spooks of the sundowns!" gasped Sark, his breath catching in his throat with a sharp click. "That's a ledge to live and die on, Tom. Have you staked her?"

"No. I waited till you come with the Chilcats. I ain't no man to move contrary to the law. You and me had already staked claims on this creek. What kind-a claims nobody could say if the matter popped up for jurisdiction. Because the hull thing was a salt, you see. We couldn't prove placer or pay-streak. And you sure kin't stake twice on the same creek. So if our Twenty-Four and Twenty-Five Above happened to be rooled on as quartz, our stakin' on this ledge would be void, and we'd lose the hull thing.

"Casino and the rest of his bunch is in the same box. They're celebratin' at his camp over thar and dunno anythin' about it, but they soon will know. Then you'll see donned sackcloth and ashes, hear lamentation and gnashin' of teeth and mebbe stop a few throwed stones with your ribs, Eric. They won't like it a leetle bit when they see the Chilcats occupyin' ground on our behalf."

"Don't let the beggars know it's done at all! I wouldn't, if I'd made the discovery. Casino's been so sufferin' smart. Just have Tagish Jim and the rest sneak along the ridge and locate these on the side."

"Kin't be done, partner," Tom pointed out. "It's too light. Thar's no dark at night now. It's only twilight, and a mighty radiant twilight at that, jist like a dawn that's goin' to break all the time but never quite pulls it off. You kin see birds on that ridge from Casino's camp, and Casino certainly won't miss spottin' them six-foot Chilcats. He ain't no ways short-sighted."

"You want to kind of rub it into him, eh Tom?"

"That's what I want to do. Rub it in with sandpaper and turpentine for an astringent. He'll git a touch of his own liniment, and we'll see how he likes it. Come on back to the fire, and I'll put Tagish Jim wise concernin' what he's to do."

As Tom came up and beckoned, Tagish Jim arose from his men about the oval of red coals.

"What um want now?" he grinned.

"Quartz claims, Tagish," Bassett explained tersely. "That ridge. You savvy? Send the men to stake from the mouth of Fresno up. The lower ones kin go in boats. The middle ones kin run down. The upper ones kin walk. I want 'em all to stake at one time, within about an hour, and git back here as soon as they stake. You stake the last claim, here at the head, yourself. Git me?"

"Get all right," grunted Tagish, his eyes lighting at the chance of some action soon. "Want um claims measured well?"

"Yours, I do. The rest'll do roughed out. Fifteen hundred feet square. Five hundred steps. The seventeen of you'll fill the string. Eric and me grubstake you. Savvy? You stake for us. Now start 'em out, quick."

TAGISH JIM moved silently to the fire, explained to his men what was required of them and told them off to row, run or walk. The ones who would stake half way down at once trotted across the creek limits. Sark helped those who were to go down to the mouth of Fresno push off their boats and drift away. Then he followed the remainder who, with Bassett at their head giving further directions to Tagish Jim, were climbing the ridge.

"Tagish, you go ahead and stake this," directed Tom, when they reached the top. "Eric and me dassen't put a finger in it. We have staked somethin' down thar. We dunno whether it's a quartz claim, placer claim or dredgin' limit, but we're law-abidin' men, and we live up to the letter of the minin' regulations. You're runnin' the hull show, and if anybody happens along jist tell 'em so. That ground under your feet is worth twelve thousand dollars if its worth a disfigured cent. You kin drive your Discovery stake right thar whar that outcrop is."

Methodically Tagish Jim went about the business. First of all he drove his Discovery stake at the spot Bassett indicated. Then he paced off seven hundred and fifty feet along the ledge on each side of the Discovery post and at these points drove posts numbers one and two.

At right angles to the line between posts one and two and beginning at the posts themselves, he paced the distance to the boundary of the already staked claims on the creek limits. This distance was not great, because the limits commenced to slope almost from the Fresno's brink with a sharp incline to strike the ridge which

formed the bench ground. It was only one hundred and eighty feet. The rest of the quartz claim lay upon the other side of the location line. But there was no need to pace that. It was a simple matter of subtraction. So Tagish went back and with a stub of a pencil scrawled the inscriptions on his stakes.

The inscription upon the first post he had driven read:

DISCOVERY POST

That upon number one and two posts was:

Quartz Claim—Tagish Jim—June 12th
1320—180

The figures 1320 represented the number of feet lying to the left of the location line, the figures 180 the number lying to the right. Thus, although the claim had no stable boundaries, Tagish Jim held in his own incontestable right a plot of ground containing fifty-one and two-thirds acres, a square plot in dimensions, though corrugated as to surface.

Sitting smoking upon a huge outjutting boulder on the ridge, Sark and Bassett watched Tagish complete the staking. When the Chilcat had inscribed, he took his ax and began to blaze more open his location line. Below him another Chilcat was working at the same thing, and below that one, dim in the hazy distance and moving like gnomes on the face of the ridge, other Chilcats staked other claims.

"The hour's about up," announced Sark, glancing at his watch. "They ought to be all on the job now. Wonder how long it'll be before Casino sees them?"

"He has seen 'em," declared Tom who had been keeping an ear trained on the creek limits. "Hear that rumpus in the scrub? He's comin' on the jump."

IN A moment the partners could see several figures rushing up from Casino's camp where all the members of the salted stampede were holding a jovial session. Casino himself was in the lead, with Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama straining after him, stumbling over rocks, logs, stumps and crashing through patches of dense undergrowth.

"Hey you," yelled Casino, catching sight of Sark and Bassett and panting up to them. "What in tarnation's afoot? Chilcat after Chilcat slips by us down-stream, and Chilcat after Chilcat runs by us over our claims, makin' for yon ridge. They're workin' there now, a whole string of them, like as if they were stakin'. What's in the air?"

"Ask Tagish Jim, thar," suggested Bassett. "We're not doin' this. He is."

"What's up, Tagish?" demanded Casino, shouting at the Chilcat who was hewing about a hundred yards down his location line.

"Quartz!" grunted Tagish phlegmatically and without turning from his work.

"Quartz!" Casino echoed. "Then I was right. I thought in my own mind the cursed creek looked more like quartz than placer. Didn't you, Sark? Didn't you, Bassett?"

"We sure did," the partners agreed.

"And what kind of showin' has the Chilcat got? Where's his discovery stake?"

"Right back of you thar, behind that outcrop. Wait. It's a fair showin'. I'll flash it up for you." Bassett stepped across, kicked the loose dirt off the quartz ledge and flared a match over the bared vein.

"Thunderation!" screeched Casino. "Fair showin'! It'll run four hundred dollars to the ton. Look at it, boys, seams of gold half an inch wide."

Up behind Casino, leaning over his back and shoulders, lying affectionately upon his neck, crowded his four comrades. So magnificent was the showing that it left them well-nigh dumb. They could gasp nothing coherent of comment or description. They could only breathe forth unintelligible monosyllabic imprecations and stare wide-eyed at the ledge.

"Stake boys, stake, fast as flesh and blood'll let you," Casino exhorted, heaving the quartette off his back. "I'm goin' in next Tagish."

"No, you ain't, Casino," differed Bassett, catching him by the arm and whirling him about in his first stride. "That ground next Tagish is staked."

"Tell me where I'll stake, then," implored Casino frantically. "Where'd you stake yourself?"

"I ain't staked. I had already staked on this creek, and by that action I surrendered my rights. So did Eric. So did you and Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama."

"W-what? That vein there spillin' over splendiferous with gold and reachin' clean

to the creek mouth by the run of the ridge, and we can't stake it?"

"No. If it could 'a' bin staked by a former staker on Fresno, I sure would 'a' done it this afternoon."

"Oh! It's your discovery is it?" snarled Casino, a cold gleam of dawning understanding lighting his features. "You found this nice little mint this afternoon?"

"Sure," nodded Bassett, "huntin' a tree trunk for a shaft ladder. It looked good on top of the two-dollar pan find, so I froze on to it."

"That was mighty considerate of you, wasn't it?" Casino gritted menacingly. "Kicked dirt over it and kept it under cover till your partner got back from Dawson City with the bunch of Chilcats. Free men, them Chilcats, as hadn't surrendered their rights on Fresno, and they could stake where they plagued well pleased. They're workin' for you. It ain't no use you denyin' that you've grubstaked them on this stunt. A chechako could see that. Am I right?"

"I ain't goin' to tell you whether you're right or wrong or merely uncertain," returned Tom surlily. "It's none of your bizness anyway. Them Chilcats have staked the hull vein clean to the mouth of Fresno, seventeen claims in a string. The claims is air-tight. Thar's no use in your jawin', Casino. You may as well shut your mouth and go back to your jubilant camp."

"Not on your blasted tin-types! You think you can file seventeen quartz claims on end and hog the whole thing, but you've made a bad misplay. Tagish Jim, you come here a minute!"

"You go to blim-blammed blazes!" retorted Tagish who was now a hundred and fifty yards down the location line. "You not my boss. Me not come when you call."

"Tagish!" commanded Bassett, albeit there was a chuckle in the command. "You come here."

AT ONCE the Chilcat dropped his ax and strode back to the group on the ledge.

"Tom my boss," he insolently grinned at the enraged Casino. "Me come when um call."

Casino glared and gulped—

"You workin' for Sark and Bassett, ain't you?"

"Sure," the Chilcat admitted.

"Told you where to stake, didn't they?"

"Sure."

"Grubstaked you, didn't they? And own half your winnings, don't they?"

"Sure."

"All right, that'll do for you. You can go back to your ax and the horny-handed toil you seem to love so well. I've asked you all I want to know. The rest of my palaver concerns your employers only."

He wheeled on Sark and Bassett.

"You heard that hard-shelled heathen's admissions? Well, so did Ante, Gunboat, Slim and Alabama. They're my witnesses. And if we took the matter to court and got a rulin' on it, just as sure as there's gold in that ledge, the court would view your action as subterfuge in the face of your surrendered rights and throw them seventeen claims open to relocation. But law and courts are slow. I'm for quick action. Now I ain't at all hoggish like you fellows, and I don't ask you to throw any of them claims open like the court would. All I ask you to do is to sell us a half share in them seventeen."

"Bluff!" sneered Bassett. "You know the court wouldn't do any sich thing. They couldn't. We stand within the law. So you try to play safe by buyin' a half share in our ground. But I tell you out loud, distinctly and with clear enunciation, Casino, that we ain't sellin'. Git me? We —ain't—sellin'!"

"You will sell!" bellowed Casino, wrathfully shaking his fist under Tom's nose. "We'll make you sell."

"Go on and make, then," challenged Tom, arising with Sark from the boulder. "Go on and make us. If Eric and me kin't trim the five of you, I'll bury my pick and shovel and quit the Yukon in dishonor and disgrace."

"Mebbe you can trim the five of us, but you sure can't trim the forty-seven of us," Casino sent back. "There's forty-two men at my camp yet."

He stepped to the edge of the bench ground and emitted a howl for help that caused the rest of his comrades to suspend their celebration at the camp and [illegible] up the slope to his aid.

"What's wrong, Casino?" demanded Halpune, foremost of the forty-two.

"These ginks have found a quartz vein three feet wide and almost solid gold.

They're gettin' the Chilcats to stake, and usurpin' the whole thing."

A violent roar went up from the crowd at the announcement. It surged up to engulf Casino, and Sark and Bassett suddenly found themselves ringed in by forty-seven half-drunken men, festering for trouble and ready to do Casino's wildest bidding.

"Will you sell?" shouted Casino through the general clamor of the mob.

"Not by a drastic sight!" Sark roared at him, his blood leaping at the nearness of the fray. "Back to back, Tom. We'll die game."

"You dodderin' fools!" Casino grated. "We don't want to kill you. But we sure will unless you give in this minute. Sell! Sell, I say, or we'll hammer you to pulp and throw the mess in the creek."

"Come on and hammer, then," invited Sark. "There'll be a few of you mashed along with us."

INSTANTLY the ugly ring closed in. But Tom and Eric had scarcely landed the first two blows when the hurtling body of Tagish Jim, jumping off the boulder above, launched through the ring.

"Wait," commanded the Chilcat. He pushed back the foremost attackers. His native stoicism had fallen from him, and his words leaped out vociferously. "Me own um claim. All um Chilcats own um claims. We sell. We don't want see um bosses killed. We sell. But we sell whole claims. No shares. Me speak for um all. Me foreman."

"Good! Better than ever!" exulted Casino, clawing his way through his comrades toward Tagish Jim and pulling out some paper from his pocket. "Here, I'll write bills of sale for the seventeen. You sign. How much do you want?"

"Don't you sell, Tagish! Don't you sell!" warned both Sark and Bassett.

They tried to lurch forward but could not make progress, for in the moment of confusion caused by Tagish Jim's jump into the ring a half-dozen antagonists had seized the arms and legs of each, fettering their action and smothering Tom's and Eric's struggles by sheer weight.

"Don't you sell, Tagish! Don't you sell!" they reiterated, even in their futile essay at freedom.

"Me got to sell," explained Tagish deprecatingly. "Me don't, they kill you. Me know. Dawson toughs. Drunk on hootch. Me sell, all right."

"How much, Tagish?" howled Casino impatiently.

"Twelve thousand a claim!" quoted Tagish. "Mebbe um not enough. But um what Tom guessed little while ago."

"Too steep!" whispered Ante and Gunboat to Casino.

"No, no," Casino whispered back, scribbling feverishly. "It runs four hundred or over to the ton. I'll swear it. Thirty tons would pay for one claim. I'll fix that figure, for fear he has another think and goes higher. Bassett's a bad guesser. So—" turning to Tagish—"here's your bills of sale. Twelve thousand a claim. And here's half your amount in the bills of sale Sark and Bassett paid me and the rest. One hundred and two thousand you savvy, Tagish? The same comin' to you yet. I'll get the bunch to write it off. You go on and sign."

IN SPITE of shouted protests from Sark and Basset, Tagish Jim signed. Casino paid over to the Chilcat the forty-seven bills of sale, totaling in value one hundred and two thousand dollars, which he had gotten from the partners for the string of Fresno creek claims and called on his comrades to sign for the amount of the remainder. Jubilantly they did so, adding their signatures to seventeen bills of sale for the quartz claims to the tune of six thousand dollars each, and the instant the transaction was closed, Sark's and Bassett's captors released them.

Tagish Jim stepped up to Tom with an apologetic, almost cringing, manner and presented him with the forty-seven bills of sale Tom had originally paid out to Casino.

"Here um your share um grubstake," he intimated sheepishly.

Bassett shoved the bills of sale into his pocket and glared at Tagish without a word as the latter went forward to distribute the proper portion to the other Chilcats who were observed coming back in a body from their staking and ambling up the slope.

"Six thousand bill um sale each um you and me; Casino buy all um claims," he told them and they accepted with amazed grins.

"But the transaction ain't valid, Casino!" stormed Bassett, raising his voice to high heaven in the anger of defeat. "If them

Chilcats had 'a' got back five minnits sooner, thar wouldn't 'a' bin any transaction at all. Thar'd 'a' bin a gen'rul massacre, and you and your bunch would 'a' bin qualifyin' right now for engraved epitaphs.

"Still, beware of flatterin' yourself that you win by the small margin of five minnits. You don't. On course, you forty-seven'll try to perjure me down, but I have here eighteen responsible witnesses to prove that them documents, the bills of sale for seventeen quartz claims on end on Fresno Creek were obtained by threat, under compulsion, through application of force and extortion and intimidation while Sark and me was held incapable and in durance vile.

"I warn you that you and forty-six others constrained us against our will and robbed us of a quartz ledge three feet wide, twenty-five thousand, five hundred feet long, runnin' in your own words four hundred dollars to the ton. Now the hull bunch of you jist let them terms and figgers sink into your dissipated consciousnesses. You'll hear 'em agin. For I'll sure take this case to the highest courts and prove my contention!"

"Like blazes you will!" laughed Casino. "You can't prove anythin' anyway. And even if you can, we'll have a smelter built and the stuff smelted down before you get judgment. Courts are slow. As for me, I'm for quick action. Halpune, give me your pick!"

Halpune handed him the pick which with the foresight of one accustomed to trouble he had grasped at Casino's first yell for aid and carried with him up onto the ridge.

"We'll just knock out some of the stuff and make a rough assay ourselves," Casino proposed, swinging the pick. "It runs that rich."

THE steel split off a big fragment of the quartz with the first blow. Casino picked it up and scratched at the splendid seams. The splendid seams came off in his hand.

"Leaf gold, Eric!" whispered Bassett in the pregnant hush. "I had a hull pocketbook full of the foil, and I tamped her into the seams on that ledge this afternoon!"

"You Shakespearean super, Tom, you ought to be on the stage!" exclaimed Sark, with a great laugh of revelation. "And you ought to take Tagish Jim with you. I see now you primed him while going up the bench land."

Casino looked up at Eric's laugh.

He looked down again at the stuff in his hand.

"Leaf gold!" he yelled in disgust, and whirled on Sark and Bassett with upraised pick. "You planted the treacherous, worthless stuff and sold me a salt!"

"I ain't sold you anythin'," snickered Tom, keeping a wary eye upon the pick. "Every man here knows I fought dead aginst sellin' to the last. You forced the Chilcats to sell to you. And they're the only ones as benefited by the deal. You've made 'em a present of six thousand dollars apiece. Eric and me git back what you skinned us outa by hikin' us forth on a fixed stampede, plankin' us down on two salted claims prepared beforehand and enticin' us to buy up Fresno Creek.

"Saltin's a game amateurs like you shouldn't play at, Casino. You're sure to git pickled in the end. You've got a dose of your own medicine, and you alone kin tell how it tastes. Now jist inform us if it tickles your palate. The odds ain't all on your side this fightin' minnit. They's nineteen of us at present aginst forty-seven of you, and my private opinion is that we kin strew the Fresno Valley with your mangled remains. You got any views on the subjeck? You desirin' any special brand of trouble. If you ain't, put down that pick!"

Casino glared malevolently at the phalanx of Chilcats backing Sark and Bassett under Tagish Jim's direction.

Each man stood six feet. Each was muscled like a grizzly and endowed with a grizzly's strength. Each had a disconcerting pair of black eyes which flashed sardonically at Casino through the half gloom, betokening contempt, mingled with the high hope of a conflict.

Casino saw their swarthy hands tightened on the helves of the axes they carried and their lithe frames all set for the spring, and wisdom triumphed over his malevolence. He dropped the pick.

"I'm not desirin' any special brand of trouble; I'm a man of peace!" he decided, and motioned his forty-six recruits on the downward path to camp.

FROM THE "TIP" OF THE ROCKET

by Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "The Treasure Jar."

"I'M GLAD you're as cross as you know how to be," observed Maia.

Perhaps the man did not hear. Certainly he did not heed. He sat looking blankly to westward, over the roofs of the city.

"Because," explained Maia brilliantly, "then you can't be any crosser than you are."

Even this perfect feminine logic did not shake the man into a reply. Maia Garth tried to crush him with a single look, but her glare was wasted. He did not see. He did not see anything but the line of black Palisades to the westward—black against an only less black sky.

Maia poked daintily with a waxed-paper straw at a fugitive cherry that lurked elusive amid the ice fields at the bottom of her long glass. Then she looked—despairingly, this time—at the man; and, noting his fixity of look, let her own gaze follow his.

Out over the heat-baked roofs, dull and misty, broken by rectangles of smoky, furnace-like glare from the intersecting streets she gazed; then over the dimmer void that was the North River, to the inky wall of rock, its crest picked out here and there with diamond points of blue-white electric lights, that stood out so primly against the starless sky behind.

The spectacle did not inspire Maia. Indeed, it vaguely depressed her. And, coupled with her escort's fixed abstraction, it tended to bring on a fit of blues.

To shake off the cloud, she turned eastward and leaned over so that she could see above the parapet of the roof-garden into whose far corner their table was wedged. Here, forsooth, was a spectacle of life to drive away the most persistent blues from any one who dwelt upon the outer crust of his own soul.

Below snapped and sparked joy! Real, hand-made joy. A form of joy that it took an aged and otherwise sane Dutch city three centuries to evolve.

The hot night air was vibrant with light and sound. A swirl of color blended and tinged the sky, from the hundred different hues cast by Gargantuan electric signs—signs that seemed to hang unstained in mid-air, in the dark murk of the Summer evening.

And in this white street itself and in its cross currents loafed and panted and sweltered the pleasure chasers, for few are adrift on Broadway at nine o'clock of an August night for anything but amusement—amusement that is fresh and optimistic; amusement that has grown stale unto boredom; noisy or apathetic or shop-worn amusement. Yet the lights, the crowds, the racket, all merged into one rather stirring note by the time they reached the altitude of roof-garden parapet.

At any rate, Maia found it a vast improvement on watching a glum-faced man eying a glum-faced line of Palisades. And thus cheered, she tried to galvanize Moylan Kiel back to life again.

"I can't just now think," she mused aloud, "of a jollier way to spend an hour in Summer than in the corner of a roof-garden, looking from a seltzer-lemonade glass that is empty to a man whose expression makes the glass seem brim full by contrast."

"H'm!" murmured Kiel abstractedly.

"Perhaps so," she agreed meekly. "That's one way of looking at it, of course. Moylan, are you thinking of staying cranky much longer? I only ask because the Fraynes are over there at the fourth table. And if you could set a time limit on your sulkiness, I could go across and sit with them till then. Or——"

Kiel came out of his abstraction with a start. Some of her words, or else a sudden realizing of her displeasure and of his own remissness, seemed to revive him.

"That is Grantwood over there," he announced, with a general gesture toward the Palisade crest. "Somewhere along there; just a little to the north, I think."

"Wonderful!" she sighed in stark rapture. "This *is* worth sitting up for! Grantwood! Oh, *think* of it! I'll just step over and tell the Fraynes. They'd love to know."

Kiel shifted his eyes from the west and looked doubtfully at her. He had not clearly understood. Her effort at irony had quite escaped him. Now he tried to rally his flagging attention.

"I—I beg your pardon," he faltered confusedly, "I——"

"It's about time," she announced, sarcasm shifting in a breath to indignation, as she caught the note of semi-penitence. "When you asked me to come here with you this evening, I was foolish enough to be a little glad. Then you brought me to this hole-in-a-corner table. And since you ordered I don't think you've spoken twenty words."

"I'm sorry. You see——"

"I don't see. If you wanted to get on a housetop and glower in dead silence at New Jersey, why did you bring me along to watch you do it? There are more exciting ways for a girl to spend the evening. Moylan!" she broke off sharply; for his troubled eyes had left her face and were once more fixed broodingly on the Palisades.

This time her exclamation brought him permanently to himself.

"I'm sorry," he said again simply. "I really am. It was rotten of me. Will—will you let me tell you about it? I didn't want to—yet. I wanted it for a surprise. That's why I asked you to come here. But if it was going to happen, it would have happened by now, I think. It's quarter past nine. And nine was the time he said——"

"If you'll put it into English," she interposed with labored patience, "perhaps I can understand part of it. Start at the subject before last. What about Grantwood? And then, passing lightly to the next cage, who is 'he'?"

"Grantwood," said Kiel, "is one of the dozen or so suburbs that fringe the top of the Palisades. Judge Gregg lives there."

"And it's out of friendship for your old chief that you stare at the Palisades he lives on? Loyal friend!"

"No," returned Kiel. "It's to see what he means to do."

"Oh," exclaimed Maia. "Certainly! If only you had a night glass and watched long enough you might even see him wind the clock and put out the cat."

"No," he corrected, "I might see him make my career, or set me adrift."

SHE looked at him keenly, and the stolid earnestness in his face her own lost its banter and annoyance. Leaning forward, she touched ever so lightly the tanned fists clenched together on the table top.

"Tell me," she said softly.

"They want him to go back to Damascus," answered Kiel. "You know how popular he was with the natives and the Turkish Government while we were there, he and I. I was only a kid at the time—the youngest vice-consul in the East, they said. But I was old enough to appreciate all that Judge Gregg was doing for Uncle Sam over there, and how he stood head and shoulders above the rest of the diplomatic bunch."

"You've told me. But I thought he came back to his law practise here because he was sick and tired of the East. Why should he go again?"

" 'Once you've 'eard the East a-callin',' chanted Kiel, villainously off key, " 'you won't 'eed nothin' else.' "

"But——"

"The Government wants him to go back. The Syrians in New York have heard about it, and they heard he was undecided. So

they went over there tonight—a big delegation of them—to wait on him; to make orations and pleas and other Oriental arguments to urge him to accept."

"But you don't think he will, do you?" asked Maia in real concern. "Why, Moylan, if he does, what will become of the plan to take you into partnership? You've built so on that plan, and——"

"I've built on it," he returned grimly, "a lot more than you can realize. Perhaps a lot more than you can care. As one of the hungry army of young lawyers in this overlawyered city I'm barely able to keep my head above water. Another ounce of weight would sink me. And—and I've been longing lately to take on a good deal more than an extra ounce. It's meant everything to me. I hadn't any right to say so. I haven't, yet, till I'm perfectly certain the Judge won't accept."

His tone sent a faint red to her throat and forehead, and her breath came a little faster. But, as he paused, she did not reply.

"The Judge solved it all when he offered me the partnership the other day," went on Kiel. "As his partner my future was assured. He made the offer conditional on his refusing the Damascus job; but I gathered that he didn't mean to take it. It's always hard to tell just what good old Gregg will do. His training in law, and in diplomacy too, has made him pretty secretive. If he takes me into partnership I'm made. If he goes to Syria I'm going, too."

"No!"

The negation broke involuntarily through Maia Garth's paling lips; and at the word a light crept into the man's eyes.

"I hope I won't have to," said he. "I'm not going as his vice-consul, as I went before. There's no future in that. I'm going to make money. I know how it can be done over there—in a hurry, too. A single stake. And the winning end of that stake is fortune. A chap tried it while I was at Damascus."

"And he won the fortune."

"No," hesitated Kiel. "He blundered. And he won—the other thing. But *I* sha'n't. I figured out the whole business, long ago, just as a matter of curiosity. And I hit on a way to do it in safety, perfect safety."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sick of plodding along on nothing a week and of working ten hours a day to get it. I manage to get bread, a roof and cheap clothes. That is all. If this partnership scheme falls through, I mean to win enough at a single throw to put me on 'Easy Street'—enough to give me the one thing in life I want."

"But what is this 'single throw'? What is the venture that you say is safe for you, but that seems to have cost some one else his life?"

She spoke with growing uneasiness. For the first time he withdrew his gaze wholly from the dark west and looked steadily at her.

"The *Shem-es-Nabi*," he made answer, half whispering the words.

"If you are beginning to talk Arabic again," she said vexedly, "just stop to remember that all of us haven't had your advantage of being the son of a missionary and of spending our childhood in Syria. A few of us are more at home with our own language."

"The '*Shem-es-Nabi*,'" he explained, too eager to be rebuffed by the interruption, "is literally, 'The Sun of the Prophet.' It was Mohammed's signet-ring."

"Oh!"

"It was the ring that Mohammed took from the dead hand of the Negus of Abyssinia, who was slain in battle by the Moslem hordes, back in the seventh century. It was supposed to be a talisman of vast power. The Negus had looted it from a Parsee shrine. On the jade stone of the ring is carved a rising sun. And there are hieroglyphs under it."

"What about it?"

"It is one of the 'Six Treasures of the Moslem Faith.' The Islamites look on it with a veneration that couldn't make you understand. It is kept under guard at the *Serail* in Damascus, and it is on view only three times a year. It will next be shown four weeks from today. And if Judge Gregg upsets my hopes by going to the East again, I'm going to take it, that day."

"Are you crazy?"

"Not yet."

"But how——"

"A silver-gilt reproduction of the *Shem-es-Nabi* was made by the Sultan's orders, years ago, and given to Judge Gregg as a special mark of honor. Only a fair copy, but good enough to deceive a casual onlooker—especially in the dim light of the *Serail*. The Judge gave it to me as a

memento when we left Damascus. I have it at home. It would be easy for a man who was quick with his hands to substitute it for the real treasure and to get out of the city before the exchange could be found out."

"The exchange? The theft, you mean! If I didn't know you were joking——"

"How would it be theft? Whose ring is it? Mohammed stole it from the dead Negus and the Negus first stole it from a Parsee temple, to which it had probably been brought as a votive offering by the general or the sheik who stole it from its original sun-worshiping owner. One can't well steal what is already stolen and whose rightful ownership was buried in obscurity nearly a thousand years ago. The ring is as much mine, or yours, or anybody's, as it is the Turkish Government's."

"That's sophistry."

"That's sense. But we don't need to argue it. For I'm perfectly sure now that there'll be no need to go for it. But if there were—well, the Sultan's people would pay enough for the ring's return to keep me comfortable forever. And then a while longer."

"You'd probably be caught."

"No, I know the country too well. I'd have framed up my line of escape. And when I got back here I'd treat with Turkey at long range."

"It's horrible! And however much you gloss it over it *wouldn't* be honest. I'm glad you don't have to do it. But why do you say there'll be no need to go? A few minutes ago you were afraid Judge Gregg might——"

"The delegation must have finished its addresses and its pleas half an hour ago. And he has refused."

"What makes you think so?"

"I know the Syrian customs. And I know from Krikorian, their chairman, that they've brought along the usual big box of fireworks. If the Judge's answer were 'yes,' then—a hundred dollars' worth of fireworks in ten minutes; and three hours' lawn-cleaning for the Judge's gardener tomorrow morning. That's why I watched the Palisades so closely, till long after nine o'clock."

"Oh, I see! And I thought you were sulking. I'm sorry I——"

"Sulking? Worse than that. It meant everything to me; the loss of everything I'd been longing for; the need to go out to Damascus on my great venture. Do you wonder I couldn't [illegible] till the danger grew less?"

"But why didn't you tell me beforehand? Then we could have watched together."

"Because I was afraid to. Because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to tell you without telling you something else—something I'm going to tell you, whether you want to hear it or not, the moment I'm certain there's no chance of his accepting. Do you mind if I leave you for a minute? It's a certainty by this time that he's refused. But I want to call him up and clinch it. Till then I've no right to say——"

A LITTLE gasp from the girl broke in on his speech. Her face had whitened and her eyes all at once had grown larger.

Moylan Kiel saw that she had shifted in her chair and was staring westward. He whirled back to his neglected post of vigil in time to see a red rocket burst high in air above the Palisades, just to the north, showering the black night with sparks and jets of falling scarlet flame.

Man and girl looked at each other in tense silence for a full minute; while a second rocket, then a third and a fourth, cut huge hairy arcs in the dull Jersey sky and strewed the lower air with their varicolored stars.

Then Moylan Kiel rose just a little unsteadily to his feet and held out his hand.

"Do you mind," he asked quietly, "if we go home now? There's a French liner sailing at dawn. And I've a bit of packing to do."

"A French liner?" she echoed vaguely.

"To Havre," he explained, as if laying out a tour for some one in whom he felt no interest. "Then across by land to Marseilles. I'll just catch a messagerie boat there for Port Said. Three days at most from there to Damascus. Perhaps two, if I can make the right ..."

"Damascus! Moylan, you're *not*——"

"Please don't," he begged her very gently. "Shall we go now?"

Dumb from plenitude of speech rather than from its dearth, she followed him to the elevator. A backward glance showed her the western skyline, at one point, fairly snapping with fireworks that danced and whizzed and sputtered, and otherwise profaned the solemn night of Summer.

She said no word, nor did Kiel, as they chugged uptown in a wheezing taxicab through the sick heat and smells of the streets. But, the door of the Garth apartment reached, and the motor-brigand dismissed, Maia spoke her mind. She spoke it briefly and in a low tone, but very much to the point.

She told the sullenly listening Kiel just what a criminally reckless and recklessly criminal exploit he was planning. She proved clearly that no man in his senses would set forth on such an errand, and that no one who was not at heart dishonest could so much as give the scheme a second thought.

She said he would break her heart with worry. Also that she should not give him a second thought nor would she care what might befall so evil a man. She told him that the taking of the *Shem-es-Nabi* would be wicked theft that no wretched legal sophistry could condone, and that a man who could do such a thing and make any girl so miserably unhappy by going into danger was not worthy her bothering over.

She did not play the virago, nor did she cry. She was a brave little girl. Her voice shook, it is true, and she spoke very fast—in fact, some of her words and even sentences had to be guessed, and Moylan guessed them with fearful correctness.

One thing, however, she did not leave to his imagination nor to the chances of guesswork. At the end of her little speech, and when a bad cold began to impede her diction, she said slowly and distinctly that if Kiel should persist in his wildly sinful intent he need never, *never* come to see her—or try to communicate with her upon his return. The acquaintance would end, here and *now*.

To which he retorted that if he did not go the acquaintance must end anyhow, since he had reached the point where it could no longer be mere acquaintance, and as finances would never, under present conditions, reach the stage where it could be anything stronger.

With which grumbled morsel of repartee he kissed her, before she could prevent him, and then strode tragically and rapidly away before she could rebuke him—a double unfairness that was perhaps the cause of her sleepless and somewhat lacrimose night.

At daybreak Maia called up Kiel's rooms. She had framed a new and absolutely irrefutable set of arguments against his going to Syria, but she had no chance to deliver them. For, after a century's wait, Central reported with blithe optimism—

"909090 Gram'cy don't seem to answer."

Then Maia called up Judge Gregg, whom she had never met.

The telephone toll from New York to Grantwood-on-the-Palisades is ten cents for five minutes. Maia's total bill was ninety cents. And at that she continued the talk, an hour later, in the Judge's Nassau Street office. And many times thereafter.

II

"LA ILLAHA ILLA 'LLAH!" smugly intoned an Imám, in pious and questioning salutation of the somewhat foreign-looking devotee in native garb who lounged past him out of the *Serail* at Damascus, just four weeks later.

And the man who the Imám had at first thought might be an outlander infidel utterly disarmed suspicion by whining unctuously in flawless Syrian Arabic—

"Sāïdna Ma'moud rasôul Allàh!"

With which speech Moylan Kiel slouched forth from the Government building with the *Shem-es-Nabi* safely reposing in the breast of his *abich*.

He went at snail's pace until he rounded the corner. Then, tucking up his robe, he ran at top speed through twisty streets and foul alleyways until he reached the native house where he lodged.

Safe in his stone-floored room there, he drew forth the ring and laid it on a tabouret near the one small barred window. The light was better than in the *Serail* treasure room, but not brilliant. So far as Kiel could see by it, the *Shem-es-Nabi* was not greatly different, on close examination, from the imitation he had so deftly substituted for it.

The band of gold was old and badly worn, so badly that its row of hieroglyphs was well-nigh effaced. There was a crack across the jade stone, splitting transversely the rude carving of a rising sun.

From its general aspect, Kiel judged that an antiquary might have given ten dollars for the ring, as it stood. Scarcely more. Yet this was one of Islam's Six Treasures—the relic supposedly endowed with magic powers, which the Prophet himself had handed down as an all-prized heirloom to

those of the Faith who should come after him. For more than twelve hundred years it had been guarded with adoring reverence, none of Islam's sons for a moment questioning its potency.

For a treasure so jealously watched over, its theft had been absurdly easy.

Kiel had reached Damascus but a day or two before the thrice-a-year exhibition of the Relics, at the *Serail*. There, vouched for by a local muezzin—whose total lack of previous acquaintance with the foreigner was easily bridged by a judicious use of *bakshish*—he had entered the treasure chamber with a line of devotees.

As he passed the guarded little shrine he had stumbled awkwardly over the hem of his robe, had lurched forward and had caught at the shrine to save himself from falling. Then as two soldiers and a priest had sprung at him he had recovered his balance, salaaming low. And as soon as possible he had withdrawn from the room and from the building, having neatly palmed the ring and left in its place the substitute presented to him by Judge Gregg.

Now that the first and worst peril was past, his wits rose to the next step. Within an hour or two the room at the *Serail* would be closed. The ring and the other treasures would be put back in their proper resting places. Then, infallibly, the guardian of the *Shem-es-Nabi* would discover the fraud, and the alarm would flash throughout all the Moslem world.

Fanatic zeal would wing the search, and that search would be of a sort not lightly eluded. Yes, and if it were not successfully eluded, there would be consequences that Moylan Kiel did not care to contemplate. There is no legal death penalty in Turkish dominions, but criminals sometimes disappear, and when they do they are seldom found again, even in sections.

Clearly, there was no time to be lost in getting out of the Ottoman Empire. The shortest way to the coast from Damascus is by way of Beirut. Next to that, a journey southward to Jerusalem and Jaffa, or a trip over the mountains westward to Tyre or Sidon, or some other coast town where ships touch.

Wherefore, as Kiel had already forecasted, every one of those ports would be watched with a vigilance that would make the all-seeing Eye of Mormonism seem strabismic. The customs folk, with an array of police-spy helpers, would infallibly search to the skin every departing native or tourist.

And Kiel had laid his plans accordingly.

Having wasted a bare half minute in the inspection of his booty, he wrapped the ring in a dirty amulet case such as desert travelers wear, and strapped it firmly beneath the bend of his left knee. He covered this strap with a ragged cloth on which were traces of dried blood. It was a typical Syrian bandage—one that would have brought tears of horror to the eyes of a first-year medical student.

Then, arranging his small hoard of money in a turban and putting it on his head, he wrapped his other belongings in a big bundle, slung it over his shoulder and, with a serviceable old-fashioned army pistol stuck prominently in his belt, sallied forth.

Through an alley he wound his way. Thence to the bazaar section, with its rattan-woven roofs of brown, through which the East's yellow light filters coolly down upon the shop-lined byways. The bazaars were crowded, for the heat of the day was passing, and Kiel was forced to slacken his pace more than once as the foot-crowds were jostled aside to permit the passing of some laden camel or string of donkeys, or a rich man's horse.

The bazaars were left behind, after an interminable time, and he swung out into the clearer passage of "The Street That Is Called Straight"— the oldest street, with a name, on earth.

In time this merged into walled orchards and then into open spaces where scavenger dogs and black-winged gray crows squabbled over carrion.

A final turn brought Kiel into a field where a swarm of men were loafing idly about a dozen busy natives who were engaged in arranging loads upon the backs of as many kneeling camels.

This was Kiel's first stopping-place, and he drifted unobserved into the throng of onlookers.

"*Ohé!*" a gorilla-faced man in a once-white caftan and a green turban was squalling. "*Ohé*, Mulai, brother of ten thousand infidels! How can the leader camel move without a breaking back when you load her with three hundred pounds on the left side and with but two hundred on the right? Is her back as unbalanced as your swinish brain, O descendant of the donkey folk?"

He bustled off to where a mangy dun camel was kneeling, and to a fat giant near the beast's head he shouted furiously:

"*Imshi*, Child of Gehenna! Be off to the gutters where you belong. Where learned you to load a caravan camel? How think you the brute will rest at night when on neither side, as he kneels, the load touches the ground? Shall we be dragging after us a worn-out saddle-galled camel before the third day? Halil, show this fool of many thumbs how to adjust the load."

From camel to camel the caravan owner moved, now nodding with an approving grunt, now shrieking imprecations whose utterances seemed to threaten him with apoplexy. To his men—as to all Oriental porters—this tirade was a daily affair, and they took it with true Eastern apathy.

AS THE owner paused a moment on his tour, Kiel approached him.

"O Brother of Giants," said Moylan ceremoniously, "may you lie where rose leaves shall fall upon your tomb!"

"May you live to scatter them there!" surlily vouchsafed the owner.

Not that he had the remotest wish of the sort nor even a rudimentary desire to be civil. But the Oriental etiquette, which demands that a conversation open with a compliment, also demands that the initial compliment be capped by one more florid, and this foreign-looking stranger looked too prosperous for the caravan owner to kick.

"You start for Bagdad?" queried Kiel.

"Yes," returned the owner more interestedly. "Have you freight? My journey is thirty-five days, to the hour. I have one camel—by the grace of Allah and to your own blessed fortune—that is not laden. Five hundred pounds she can bear. And my price for safe delivery of her cargo will be but——"

"I have no freight."

The owner, in disgust, turned back to his work of supervision. He had no time and less inclination for answering idle queries.

"But I wish to go as a passenger," announced Kiel, loudly enough for all around him to hear, and speaking with a studied nervousness. "I am in haste to reach Bagdad. Can you let me ride with you and spare me food?"

"No!" snarled the owner.

"*Bismillah*," carelessly returned Moylan, and walked off.

The owner let him go a few steps. Then, finding he showed no sign of coming back, ran after him.

"One hundred *medjidie*," he said.

"Robbery!" wailed Kiel.

"The miles of the journey are long, O Effendi!" explained the native.

"But the feet of my brother's camels are swift as the wings of the day," replied Kiel, in true Eastern bargain tone, "and they are in grace like to the sacred beast that bore the Prophet—on whom be peace—from Medina. I am stricken and poor. I do not own a hundred *medjidie*."

"Eighty-nine," countered the camel-man, now in his element as a trafficker.

"*Inshallah!* Is my purse so red with gold? I am poor. What says the blest Koran? 'He that hearkeneth not unto the cry of the True Believer who is needy——' "

"Eighty," retorted the other.

"It is sheer theft!" moaned Kiel right loudly. "But my need is great. I accept!"

The camel-man had great ado to keep from bursting into tears. He had asked a hundred *medjidie* for a passage worth thirty. And he had hoped by judicious bargaining to get his customer to pay forty. Now, starting at a hundred, he had been taken up when he got to eighty. And he cursed his stars that he had not in the first place demanded from the spendthrift fool five hundred.

The listening crowd, too, murmured loudly in wonder at such a bargain. Tongues were certain to wag in the bazaars on the morrow anent the man whose need for instant departure from Damascus was so great that he paid almost treble the regulation passage money for the privilege.

"Eighty *medjidie*," the discomfited owner at last found breath to acknowledge, adding as a clever afterthought:

"Half in advance. The rest at the oasis of——"

A commotion from the rear of the crowd drew all eyes away from the chaffering. The hero of the place had just come into the Square of Caravans. He was a huge negro, clad in spotless white; a kinky beard and shaven upper lip distinguishing him from the other blacks scattered through the throng.

His reception by the idlers reminded Kiel strongly of the entrance of Escamillo, the Toreador, in "Carmen."

This black giant was a local hero, the demigod of loafers and camel-men alike. Even the arrogant little caravan owner deigned to smile pleasantly at him, for the newcomer was the great Ben Nassar Raad, mail-carrier between Damascus and Bagdad. Where the ordinary plodding caravan took from five to six weeks to make the tedious journey across the Syrian Desert, Raad on his Bisharin racing camel covered the distance in ten brief days —a feat that called forth the wondering admiration of all Syria.

To him sand-storm, Bedouin raid, perils of thirst, of sickness, of sunstroke, were matters for easy scorn. Was he not the fearless Raad whom no less a personage than the Pasha himself was wont to salute in the bazaar?

Kiel grudgingly paid down his forty *medjidie* advance money to the caravan owner, finding and counting out each piece with a separate groan. As he finished the operation his glance momentarily crossed that of Raad—Raad whose pet he had been as a child, in the mission house at Nabous —Raad, with whom he had passed an important hour the previous day—Raad, who at this minute had in his money-belt three hundred *medjidie* which Kiel had turned over to him twenty-four hours earlier.

The negro's gaze traveled carelessly past Kiel, and the redoubtable mail-carrier continued on his way to the corner of the field where his two camels were cared for by a black attendant.

Between these two camels and those of the caravan there was as much difference as between a Percheron and a thoroughbred race horse. Gray-white in hue, they were clean of limb, graceful as fawns, unbelievably swift.

One was for Raad's use; the other was to traverse the desert journey, alongside, in case of accident or emergency. He rode each on alternate trips.

Both now were well rested from the last jaunt from Bagdad. Their spongy feet were free from abrasions. Their humps were high and pendulous. At a pinch, and if not meantime supplied with water, both were able to travel a hundred leagues, across desert sands, in five days.

But at the end of such a forced ride their humps would be little larger than a man's two fists, and they would be as savage as sick bears. And, after stopping for water, they would be loggy and slow for the next two days.

"The mail-carrier starts when we do?" Kiel asked the caravan owner.

"Not he!" sneered the latter. "He is too proud to start with common folk. And he starts after star-shine, that he may make his first twelve hours in the cool. Mount your camel, Effendi. We start. *Mleh!*"

His cry of "*Mleh!*" was taken up by his men. Kiel jumped to his kneeling mount. Grunting and bubbling, the twelve heavy-laden draft camels scrambled to their feet and, of their own accord, took their proper alignment for the march.

It was not Moylan Kiel's first, nor hundredth, experience in the unlovely art of camel riding. He understood the knack of getting into the divan-like, high-pommeled saddle and, once there, how to dispose of the painful excess of leg length that such a position always develops.

He did not even feel the almost universal qualm that assails amateur riders when a camel rises pitchingly to its feet and strikes its gait—a gait not unlike the motion on a ship deck in a choppy sea.

Off moved the twelve-beast caravan in triple alignment, four deep, sixty feet between ranks, out of the Square of the Caravans and outward toward the barely visible strip of sand that lay like a yellow sword-blade, a day's journey to the northeast.

Kiel settled himself, as nearly comfortable as an outlander may, on his huge saddle. He caught the rough, sagging motion and swayed his body, native fashion, to it. He was the only rider. The natives at this early stage of the journey chose to plod afoot beside their ungainly charges. Later, when the desert sands should begin to burn the feet and the desert suns to play unholy tricks with the eyes, they would be clamoring for their turn to climb atop the more lightly burdened of the brutes.

The owner, first removing from his feet a pair of vehemently scarlet slippers and slinging them over his shoulder for safety, took his place at the head of the caravan. A tiny gray bell-donkey pattered sturdily at his side—the donkey that is the mascot, the real guide, the highly important leader of every Syrian caravan.

Camels may bolt, may sulk, may go *musth*, may exhibit in any fifty ways an artistic temperament that would make a prima donna seem stolid by comparison—

indeed, they usually do. At such times all human power over them sinks into obscurity compared to the control exerted by that one sober little gray donkey. The tinkle of its bell is more potent than the frenzied howls of all the professional drivers in Islamlik.

Kiel remembered, from his vice-consular days, the case of a quasi-humorous American who had been haled to the Damascus *Serail*, on the grave accusation of *lese-majeste*, for propounding to his Syrian dragoman the conundrum—

"Why is the Ottoman Empire like a string of camels?"

The answer, "Because it is led by a donkey," had been taken by the dragoman as of doubtful compliment to the Sultan. He had so reported it, and Judge Gregg had needed all the influence of the consulate to clear the ribald one.

Kiel, familiar with the surrounding country, knew to an inch where the caravan would rest for the night. He knew, too, that the present jolting would be of short duration, since, whether a caravan starts at dawn or at dusk, its first day's journey is precisely forty furlongs—no more nor less—and it has been so from the birth of history, for what cause no living man knows, any more than it is known why the universal speed of all camel caravans is gaged to the second at sixteen furlongs an hour.

Wherefore, by Kiel's calculations, the night's rest would occur a hundred yards beyond the Tomb of Assad, five miles from the Square of the Caravans, and the halt would be called in just two and one-half hours from the time of starting. It was to prevent a premature halt that the start had been delayed until after the late afternoon call to prayer.

The forecast was wholly correct, as forecasts involving Eastern customs—but not Eastern temperaments—are more than reasonably certain to be. Just beyond the tomb the camels were made to kneel, and there, still laden, they were left for the night, while fires were lighted and food prepared.

His labors and his vocal efforts momentarily ended, the caravan owner looked about for his passenger, with whom he had decided, during the five-mile walk, to have a most interesting and profitable conversation.

He was barely in time to see Kiel walking slowly away from the firelight radius out into the starry darkness, to southward, his bundle over his back. That a man should needlessly carry any burden was beyond the grasp of the owner's Oriental mind, and he inferred that Kiel, stretching his legs after the ride, had feared to leave his bundle behind lest it be looted.

The incident gave the Syrian a desirable peg whereon to hang his carefully prepared talk.

"*OHÉ*, Effendi!" he hailed Moylan. The latter moved on without turning. The pursuer's short legs were put to their best to catch up the passenger two hundred yards away from camp.

"What does this mean?" raged the caravan owner, in a rage not wholly made to order, when at length he ranged alongside his quarry. "Why do you carry your luggage when you stray? My men are honest. I am their master—I, Imbarak the Honest."

"Well," laughed Kiel, glancing about him and then laying down his bundle in the narrow camel track that links Damascus with Bagdad, "what then, O Imbarak the Honest? May I not do as I will with mine own?"

"Your own?" scoffed Imbarak. "'Tis the catchword of every thief."

"Thief?"

"No man pays triple passage money unless he is in flight," summed up Imbarak; "no man guards a bundle unless it be precious. You are a thief. You have stolen that which is of value and puts the black fear into your heart. You are in flight."

"Well?" repeated Kiel amiably. "What then, my little man?"

The calmness of the accused rudely shook Imbarak's convictions that he was a thief. For do not thieves—Syrian thieves—on accusation, ever beat their breasts and cry aloud upon Allah to witness their innocence?

Yet of one thing Imbarak was right certain—Kiel must have had some powerful reason for leaving Damascus in haste, to have made him pay so exorbitant a price. And, whatever the reason might be, its very existence sufficed Imbarak the Honest.

"When I took you as my passenger," said he, "I consented to a low fare, since you besought me in the name of Allah the Merciful and because you vowed you were poor.

You are not poor. And you are a thief. Therefore I will take you no step beyond this."

"No? Then I must walk back to Damascus to await the next caravan, and meantime to lay information before the Cadi against one Imbarak the Honest, who hath robbed me of forty *medjidie* in passage-money."

"You dare not go before the Cadi. For I, too, shall return, at your side, and I shall tell why I refuse to let you bring ill fortune to honest folk by remaining on the march with us. On suspicion you will be searched and——"

"Exactly. How much?"

Here was a man with a soul too gross for the bliss of bargaining, and with a sigh of joys foregone, Imbarak the Honest replied—

"Nine hundred *medjidie*."

"Oh, Offspring of the Gadarenes," observed Kiel, "if I possessed nine hundred *medjidie* I would not be traveling with outcasts upon lame and mange-stricken camels, owned by a pickpocket of the bazaars."

To be termed a pickpocket and to hear his men referred to as outcasts was a mere every-day pleasantry that ruffled Imbarak the Honest not at all, but a slur on one's camels is as mortal an insult as is an affront to one's religion. And at the expressions "lame and mange-stricken" Imbarak figuratively and literally soared high in air, and he came down bodily upon Kiel, ugly curved belt-knife in fist.

Kiel took the assault as philosophically as a move in a chess-game. It was, in fact, a move he himself had prepared, and he was quite ready for it.

Imbarak struck downward—a move in Syrian knife-fighting that means merely a wound or a scratch, as differentiated from the gruesome up-thrust and its subsequent wrench of the crooked blade.

Kiel neatly blocked the blow with his bundle—which received thereby a mortal wound in its vitals—and with his right fist caught the Honest Imbarak flush on the left point of the chin.

The caravan man was transformed into a limp huddle of twitching clothes.

"He ought to be good for at least five minutes," mused Kiel, as he hurried cityward along the camel track, "unless I've forgotten how to put steam into a right lead."

A hundred yards farther on he stopped, as a soft quadruple *pad-pad-pad* of spongy feet broke on his ear. Two camels, huge in the gloom, rose ever larger, in his path.

"Raad!" called Moylan softly.

"It was well played, Howaji!" laughed the negro as he made the led camel kneel to receive its new burden. "Yet it is worth my commission if it be found out. Here are the swathing-cloths. Wrap them as I taught you, else you will be shaken to a jelly before the ten days be past. Now, mount and ride. We can reach Bagdad and you can leave it, full ten days ahead of the hue and cry."

III

MAIA GARTH had made it clear—very painfully clear—that Kiel's venture in quest of the *Shem-es-Nabi* would mark the end of his acquaintance with her. She had told him so, many times and from different angles, that August night when he left her at the door of her apartment. She had expressly forbidden him to hold any further communication with her on his return from the East.

For which excellent reasons, Moylan went to the Garth apartment direct from the ship. He arrived at a barbarously early hour and had the good fortune to find her at home and momentarily devoid of visible relatives. It was not an average condition, and he took hope.

She received him as if he had called barely a day before, instead of after a lapse of more than two months; nor did a shade of expression show she noted how thin and how brown he had grown, and that a queer hunted look was still lurking at the back of his eyes.

"Well?" was her cryptic greeting.

"I have it," was his, as he drew forth the *Shem-es-Nabi*.

"So I see," she answered, scarcely glancing at it, "but you've forgotten something."

"I—I don't——"

"That I don't care to number thieves among my friends."

"It *isn't* theft!" he burst forth. "I explained that——"

"I don't want to discuss it. Will you go now, please?"

He looked at her and he saw she was far worse than angry. She was entirely herself—cool, unruffled, pleasantly firm. He read no possible change of verdict in her clear eyes.

"As you like," he said, feeling all at once very sick and old. "I got this thing, and I risked my life to get it. Then I dodged the knife of a camel-man to keep it. Then I made a ten-day trip that was a hospital-furnace nightmare, fringed with two Bedouin chases, a touch of sunstroke and a day of sand blindness. I've spent every dollar I had on earth—all for this measly relic, and for what it meant to me. And now it—it means nothing."

"Nothing at all," she assented sweetly.

"Good-by!" he muttered, trying to find the door.

"It *is* good-by," she agreed. "I'm sorry, but it is."

He paused, looked at the ring in his palm, then again at her.

"You've made your choice," she reminded him, in an access of tact.

"Yes!" he growled. "I've made it. Just this minute. If it weren't for this thing, you'd let me——"

"Isn't it too late to think of that?"

"No. I'll—I'll send it back. I'll—have it sent to the *Serail* at Damascus, if you'll——"

"Are you in earnest?"

"Do I look like a merry jester?"

"It means all that to you?"

"What's the use of rubbing it in? You know what it means, even though I've no right now, to tell you, and probably never shall have. Let it go at that. I can keep on coming here sometimes if I send this ring back?"

"Yes."

He looked again at the ring, then looked only at her and tried to forget that he had ever dreamed and ventured.

"You'd have saved time and money," she went on unkindly, "by believing me when I said the same thing last August."

"I thought—I thought when you saw what I had done, and—and knew it meant wealth——"

"I tried to catch you by cable; but——"

"I didn't use my own name. It was safer not to."

"I see. And how will you get the ring back?"

"I'll send it to Judge Gregg. He must be there by now. He'll manage the diplomatic part of the business."

There was another miserable pause. Then Maia twisted the subject.

"There's an Italian colony on the Palisades just south of Grantwood," she observed irrelevantly.

He looked at her in tired perplexity, but made no comment on the wondrous news. She continued:

"It seems they had a fiesta of some sort out there—a Saint's Day, or something—last August. Bands and—and fireworks."

"Fireworks?"

The word woke uncomfortable memories.

"Yes. Rockets and things. A lot of them. At night, you know."

And at last a gleam of intelligence dawned in Moylan's deadened brain.

"Rockets?" he babbled feebly. "Not the night when we——?"

"Yes."

"But Judge Gregg——"

"Judge Gregg is still waiting impatiently for a man he wants as a law partner."

"Oh!"

"He is a dear," pursued Maia enthusiastically. "I like him. We've become pretty well acquainted these last two months, he and I."

"He——"

"He talks so interestingly about the East. For instance he told me a secret—a terribly *secret* secret—the Sultan told him. Want to hear it?"

Moylan was too busy digesting facts to reply. But she took his assent for granted.

"THE Sultan told him," said she, "that the *Shem-es-Nabi* has been locked in the treasure vaults under Yildiz Kiosk for three hundred years. An imitation of it is on view at Damascus. Or, rather, a series of imitations. For they are stolen at the rate of three a year. So a big supply is kept on hand. The Sultan gave one to Judge Gregg. Every now and then a story is carefully circulated that some one has been killed for stealing the ring."

"The—the——"

"You didn't steal anything. You just traveled across the world to change one copy of a ring for another. Wasn't it funny? And— Oh, you bad, *poor* boy! *Don't* look like that! How thin you are, and how brown; and—oh, it's a *shame*, dear!"

GOLD AT SEA

A Three Part Story

PART TWO

by

Norman Springer

Author of "For Ways That Are Dark" "For Tricks That Are Vain."

SYNOPSIS—After Chief Engineer *Donald McNiel*, refuses to ship on a third voyage through [illegible] fortune by *Judson Haffner*, shipping agent, seconded by *Captain Darcy*, he stops on West Street [illegible] the loading of the liner *Mauresubia*, said to carry a cargo of fabulous value. While at the [illegible] a girl's purse from two thugs. She rewards him with her name *Mary Morrison*, the information that she is to sail for England on the *Mauresubia*, and a rose.

McNiel treads air for hours. Then he visits a Brooklyn wharf-saloon in answer to a message left for him by *Darcy*. He is shanghaied and awakes aboard the cargo steamer *Ormsby*, bound [illegible] with supplies for a British man-of-war. Believing the story, *McNiel* accepts the chief engineer's berth, but soon notices queer things. The boat is grossly over-manned by a gang of sea-rufflans [illegible] the notorious *Hot Scotch Henderson*, first mate, and *Dr Farley*. Discipline is lacking. [illegible] have a common interest which they carefully keep from *McNiel*.

At night *McNiel* is held up in his room by *Dooin*, a little detective from the Department of Justice, stowaway aboard the *Ormsby*, who has been hiding in a lifeboat. *Dooin* quickly convinces *McNiel* that *Doc* and his crew are playing some bigger game than mere contraband running. [illegible] Street, he says, is with *Haffner* and *Darcy* in the plot. And he shows the chief engineer that they must work together or they will go over the rail together, once *Darcy* has succeeded since dead men [illegible]

VIII

ALL THE morning the *Ormsby* pounded her way to the eastward. After nine o'clock the wireless was busy. I could hear the crackle of the juice as it leaped through the spark gap, even in the engine-room.

Once, when I had climbed the ladder for a breath of fresh air, I saw the nimble Mr. Podd dance up the bridge ladder with a dispatch in his hand. Mr. Podd was evidently in high spirits again.

Courtney was also abroad. He bobbed out of the chart-house, grabbed the dispatch from Podd's hand, and bobbed in again. From these signs I concluded that the *Ormsby* was approaching her destination.

The watch passed slowly. My thoughts dwelt constantly upon the little man crouching in the life-boat, and upon the conversation I had had with him. What was the game? Would Mr. Dooin's vague fears prove well-founded? Was the *Ormsby* other than she seemed?

I had no trouble with the men. In fact, my evil-looking gang worked their heads off; and if they didn't exactly look as if they enjoyed it, they took good care that none of their muttering reached my ears. But there was a good deal of clandestine whispering among them, and about them an air of expectancy.

And when I was relieved and went on deck at noon, I saw and felt the same expectancy and suppressed excitement in the rest of the crew. The deck crowd no longer sprawled about the forehatches; they stood about in groups. Through the cabin door I saw Doctor Farley and Ralder in close communion. Upon the bridge Henderson stood in earnest conversation with the man at the wheel.

I clambered to the boat skids on the starboard side, and got into communication with Dooin. I saw that the canvas covering on the life-boat had been slit for a few inches near the stern. An air-hole! I leaned carelessly across the gunwale, pretended to be scanning the sea and whispered to the [illegible]

"Are you there? This is McNeil."

"Yes," came the answer. "What news?"

"There is something in the wind," I answered. "Everybody is excited. I think we are coming up to our position."

"Anything in sight?"

"No, not even a smoke trail. But the wireless has been working all morning. The messages are for Courtney."

"Have you heard anything?"

"No, they fight shy of me. They stop talking whenever I draw near."

"Well, keep your eyes skinned. Mosey around and maybe those sports will let you hear or see something."

I "moseyed" around. I went up on the bridge and interrupted the tête-à-tête between Henderson and the man at the wheel. They stopped talking as soon as I hove in sight, but I knew that it was not because Hot Scotch was abashed that I had discovered him gossiping with a forecastle hand. He met me with a smile.

"Well, Mac, how's things below?" he greeted.

"Well enough," I replied. "What's our position?"

"I don't know," he lied; I knew he lied because I had seen him and Dacy taking the sun as I came off watch.

"Tell that to a marine," I told him. "If you don't want to answer a civil question, say so—don't lie."

"Don't get sore, Mac," he grinned. "I got an awful poor memory for figures this trip—I was advised to have."

I stepped into the chart-house. Captain Dacy was stretched upon the couch, reading; Courtney was seated at the table, poring over a dispatch, and consulting a little book at his right hand; a code book, evidently.

"Hello, Chief!" exclaimed Dacy. "Did you have any trouble with the watch this morning?"

"No," I told him. "You put the fear of God into them. What is the position, Captain?"

"Western Ocean," he answered promptly. "Thirty-six hours from New York."

He smiled when he said it, but there was a light in his eyes that forbade further questioning.

"Good morning, Mr. Courtney," I remarked. "Still seasick?"

Courtney lifted a dismal, greenish-hued face.

"My word, yes. This beastly ship will be the end of me, you know. I'll never feel like eating again."

"Oh, not so bad as that," I said easily. "Wait till we come alongside your countryman—you can go aboard her and dine with comfort. Those big battle-wagons are as steady as a church in this fine weather."

"But she isn't so big," explained Courtney dismally. "From what I have heard, you know, she'll be worse than this ship. She is only——"

"Oh, McNeil," interrupted the captain, "are your cargo-pumps ready? We shall need them soon. I wish you would see that they are gotten ready this afternoon. Set Johnson to work upon them."

The captain was no longer smiling. His voice had just the hint of a savage edge. I left.

BEFORE the cabin door I encountered the mysterious Mr. Podd. He hugged a book to his breast, and his face was alight with some happy, dreamy excitement. His shoulders twitched convulsively.

"How are you, Mr. Podd. Have you definitely decided upon your particular French Red Devil?" I inquired.

"Oh, Mr. McMeal," he answered happily, "I have discovered that one must have family traditions. All of our best people have family traditions, Mr. McMeal. This is 'Hearts Entwined,' by Robert C. Bambers, the famous authority. He states that a gentleman must have family traditions."

"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "Do you anticipate any difficulty in procuring your traditions? Just what sort of traditions do you desire?"

"I never thought of that," he answered uncertainly. "But I shall acquire family traditions," he continued confidently. "When I receive my share I shall get whatever is necessary—I shall be guided by Mr. Bambers."

"You are fortunate to have such an authority to rely upon," said I. "Not every favorite author could do as much. What will your share come to?"

"Not half as much as yours," was the unexpected reply.

"Do you think it will be enough for your plans?" I asked, thinking of the thousand dollars that had been promised me.

"Of course," he replied, "it will be a fortune. There are twelve——"

"Podd, you might be needed in the wireless-room!" came a level-voiced interruption.

I turned. Doctor Farley stood in the cabin doorway, regarding Podd with a menacing glare. He said nothing more, but the luckless Podd collapsed like a punctured balloon. A look of deadly fear came into his staring eyes, and he turned and dashed for his station at top speed.

"Your dinner is ready, Mr. McNeil," said Farley.

I gulped over my astonishment and disappointment.

"All right," I answered. "I'll be there in a moment. I have to go below just now."

In the engine-room I found Mr. Johnson, alias Werner, already at work upon the cargo-pumps.

"They are to be in working condition this afternoon," I stated.

"*Ja*, I yoost overhaul dem," he answered.

"By the way, Mr. Johnson," I asked, "have you figured out what your share will come to? A neat sum, hey?"

He drew himself up stiffly, and his face flushed.

"I nod work for dere dirty gold," he said. "I strike for der——"

He checked himself and regarded me resentfully.

"Vait, you see!" And he turned to his work.

I tried to prod him into another outburst, but without success. "Der pumps vill be ready," was all I could obtain from him.

I returned to the deck and made my way to Dooin.

"Well, I've 'moseyed' around," I whispered to the hole in the canvas.

"Good sport!" came his voice. "What did you discover?"

"The first mate is a clam—no news from him. Captain Dacy, ditto. I tried to pump Courtney, but Dacy interfered just as I was about to learn something. I know one thing—the British ship we are bound for is a small ship, and we will raise her some time today or tonight.

"But they are very secretive. I couldn't even discover the position of the ship."

"Don't you know where we are?" asked Dooin.

"No idea of the latitude and longitude. But, allowing for change of course, I figure we are about three hundred miles [illegible] north of New York."

"Umph," grunted Dooin. "Kind of vague if need arose and we were able to send a wireless. Anything else?"

I told him about Podd, the wireless man.

"I think he is crazy, but not too crazy," I said. "He's spending a fortune in his mind, with the aid of a popular author. The fortune is to be his share from this trip—and he stated that I also shared in the cut. Pretty soft for me, but I would like to know more about it. Podd was scared silly when Farley interrupted us—evidently had no business talking to me. What do you make of it; just a fairy tale?"

"I don't know," muttered Dooin. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I asked my German friend about his share. He got insulted and told me he did not work for their dirty gold. Said he was striking for something or other."

"Phew!" exclaimed Dooin. "Say, this ship isn't armed, is she?"

"No, I thought of that—privateering or something like that. But the old tub is so slow she couldn't catch a brick-scow."

"Well," remarked Dooin, "we'll just have to await developments. Something is rotten!"

We talked a little while longer, and he asked me particularly about Podd. He was interested in his mercurial spirits and nervous habits.

"He may be our man," he commented finally.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, every chain has its weak link. Look for the weak link." With which answer I had to content myself.

"I am going to snatch a bite to eat, and then turn in," I told him at last. "I need sleep. I'll try to have a word with you before I go on watch again.

ANY engineer is sensitive to engine sounds. At sea, the rhythm of the screw is ever present in his consciousness, and waking or sleeping he is instantly aware of any change in the movement.

Hence, I awoke when the *Ormsby* slowed down. I lay idly for a moment, listening to the crackle of the wireless; then through the open port came the sound of Captain Dacy's voice shouting orders.

I rolled out. With the Captain giving orders, there must be something afoot. I had turned in standing, so I was on deck immediately.

One glance ahead showed me what the hullabaloo was about. We had arrived. A half-mile ahead, on the starboard bow, a long, gray, three-funnel torpedo-boat destroyer lay motionless on the smooth sea.

Captain Dacy was in active command upon the bridge; Courtney, his sickness forgotten, danced excitedly in and out of the chart house; Henderson and Ralder drove their watches about the decks with unaccustomed vigor; everything was being done with snap and ginger. The strong hand had taken hold.

I lost no time in clambering up beside the life-boat.

"We have arrived!" I whispered, as I leaned across the gunwale and examined the craft we were approaching.

"What is it?" came Dooin's answer.

"A torpedo-boat destroyer," I said. "A big one—no flag, but of course she is the Britisher. She's a big oil-burner."

"Any news?" he asked.

"No. We are getting ready to go alongside her. Lines are out, and a gang is opening the hatch to number one hold where the stores are. Captain Dacy is on the job."

Captain Dacy proved he was on the job by hailing me that very moment.

"Oh, McNeil, come here, will you?"

I made my way to the bridge, and Dacy drew me aside in the wing and spoke confidentially.

"McNeil, will you go below and take charge? That Dutchman has just informed me through the speaking-tube that the cargo-pumps are disabled. We shall need them immediately."

"They were all right this morning," I said. "I tested them myself. Johnson was overhauling them this afternoon."

"He has evidently disabled them," said Dacy. "See what you can do."

I hurried to the engine-room. Johnson was standing by the throttle, unworried and indifferent.

"What is the matter with the pumps?" I asked.

"I haf not time to finish der job," he replied.

I walked over, examined the two pumps and almost collapsed. Disabled! They were all but wrecked! There was not a ring of packing or a valve in place in either pump; the bonnets were off and the nuts scattered, the rods were lying upon the floor-plates. The busy Mr. Johnson, in a few hours of bungling, had caused damage that would take most of the night to repair.

I was furious, and cursed him roundly. He smiled philosophically and answered nothing. I was so angry that I failed to remark upon the strangeness of any engineer doing such a thing. Then, my tongue having eased my mind a bit, I started to work.

We were soon tied up to the man-o'-war; Johnson was receiving bells from the bridge even before I started to work. As soon as the rattle of the deck winches apprised us below that the stores were being transferred, Johnson quietly disappeared, without even offering to help me. I was quite content to have him go.

I pressed the watch into service, and after a fifteen-minute trial, during which they deliberately undid all I accomplished, I drove them away. Then I sweated and swore and labored alone.

Captain Dacy came down, and with him was a youngish man in the undress uniform of an officer of the British Navy.

"This is Captain Montague, of the *Wasp*," said Dacy to me. "Captain Montague, this is my chief engineer."

Captain Montague inclined his head in my direction a frigid half-inch. In return I gave him a nod that was as curt, and continued with my work.

"We have been working upon the pumps ever since we left New York," glibly explained Dacy. "We had hoped to have them ready by the time we came up with you, but there was too much to be done upon them. But McNeil assures me that they will be in operation before morning."

"I should hope so. My word, they must be!" exclaimed the Englishman. "We haven't enough oil in our tanks to last us two hours' steaming, and we must be away by morning."

"I'll have them running by midnight," I told him. "Two hours' pumping will fill you up."

Captain Montague was much relieved, and his face cleared.

"That will do very well," said he. "I do not care so long as I get my fuel by daylight. It is safe enough to lay by you this fair weather, and I will admit that all of us

will relish a few consecutive hours' sleep. My ship is a poor place for rest when under way. If you like, Mr. Engineer, I will send over a couple of my artificers to lend you a hand."

"No, thank you," I answered hastily. "I can make out very well alone."

I had no desire to have a couple of supercilious navy men working at my elbow. The Englishman did not press his offer, for which I was grateful.

He and Dacy stood there talking for some time; Dacy lying volubly, and protesting that we had been laboring night and day upon recalcitrant pumps since leaving port. Dacy's readiness to lie to save his face surprised me; I had not thought him that kind of man. But it was none of my business, and I kept my mouth shut. Finally they departed and left me alone.

I kept my promise to have the pumps in running condition by midnight. Then, ascertaining through the speaking-tube from the bridge that everything at the other end was in readiness, I started the oil into the war-ship's tanks. I set an oiler to watch the pumps, and dirty, tired and hungry, climbed to the deck.

I had intended to communicate with Dooin, but found no opportunity for doing so immediately. Henderson met me at the engine-room door and escorted me forward, grown garrulous of a sudden, and regaling me with an off-color story.

The destroyer was lying by our starboard side, dark and quiet. Our own decks were black, the stores evidently all transferred. I looked over the rail at the war-ship; but beyond a few dim forms visible on her bridge, her decks seemed deserted. Henderson stuck at my side, and seeing no chance to reach Dooin just then, I entered the cabin.

Dacy, Farley and Podd were in the cabin. Dacy greeted me effusively, complimented me upon a task well done and offered me the use of his own bath in which to clean up. Farley smiled upon me ingratiatingly and informed me that he had saved a hot dinner for me. Podd grinned vacantly and conveyed the impression that the sight of me gave him unalloyed delight. Henderson continued his reminiscences. It seemed as if all were now cultivating me even as they had before avoided me.

I was too dirty and hungry to take much interest in anything save a bath and supper, for the time being. I enjoyed the captain's tub, and I then sat down to the appetizing mess the big negro, Turk, brought me from the galley.

WHILE I ate, I became acutely conscious of the peculiar bearing of my companions. Farley paced nervously up and down the cabin; Henderson was absurdly loquacious; Podd said nothing, but sat tensely on the edge of a chair, his bulging eyes glisteningwith excitement. Only Dacy was calm; he sat with immobile face, a cigar-stump clamped between his jaws.

From their demeanor, I gained the impression that something was about to happen. What, I did not know, could not guess. Who could have guessed the truth? But my liveliest curiosity was aroused, and in a measure I was placed upon my guard.

"Captain Montague was well pleased when the pumps started," remarked Dacy. "He has turned in with the rest of his crew. Poor chaps, they have a hard time at sea in that class of ship."

"I noticed her decks darkened as I came forward," I responded. "Isn't Captain Montague taking quite a chance—leaving his vessel practically unguarded, at sea, and in wartime?"

"No danger," answered Dacy. "He has posted an anchor watch, and all lights are doused both upon the *Wasp* and upon us. His men could turn out at a moment's notice."

"She is a mighty long way from a safe base," I commented. "A destroyer doesn't usually operate alone, so far from a home port."

"The *Wasp* is one of a new type," said Dacy. "She has a steaming radius of two thousand eight hundred miles with oil fuel, and a speed of thirty-six knots when driven. She is from Halifax, and has been cruising off New York for a couple of weeks. She is better for commerce destroying than a larger vessel."

"Where is Courtney?" I asked.

Mr. Podd jumped nervously at the question and glanced at Farley.

"Gone to bed," said Farley.

"Where I am going directly," I answered. "I am tired."

"Have a nip of schnapps before you go," said Dacy. "Farley, there is a bottle upon the sideboard."

Farley stepped to the sideboard behind

me. I noticed Podd watching him, mouth agape. Aroused, I directed my eyes to the mirror hanging on the wall in front of me.

In the mirror, I saw Farley pick up the bottle and pour out the drink. Then he cast a quick look at my back, drew a tiny bottle from his breast-pocket and passed his hands across the top of the glass intended for me. It was all done in a flash.

"Here you are, Chief," said Farley. "Prime Kentucky stuff—do you good!"

He handed the doctored glass to me. I took it, stood up and looked him square in the eye. Such was the man's effrontery he never blinked an eye, though he must have known from my look that I knew what he had done.

His aplomb touched the tinder to my choler. I dashed the drink into his face and took him by the throat. I thrust my hand into his breast-pocket and whipped out the phial. It was unlabeled, and the contents a colorless liquid.

"You little crook!" I cried, shaking him. "What do you mean by drugging my drink?"

He struggled futilely, and I tightened my clutch on his windpipe. Then he was torn from my grasp, and I found myself struggling desperately with Dacy and Henderson who had flung themselves upon me.

I downed Henderson with a blow on the jaw, and wrestled furiously in the iron grasp of Captain Dacy. He was a stronger man even than I.

I heard rushing feet on the deck without, in answer to his low, sharp cry. Men swarmed into the cabin. I was seized from behind and my arms pinioned.

It had happened so quickly—my anger and its consequences—that I was dazed. I made an effort to continue the struggle, and found myself powerless to move. My arms were twisted behind me, and strong, expert hands clutched my wrists.

"Don't disable him," I heard Dacy say.

I subsided and twisted my head around. The cabin was filled; a half-dozen men had answered Dacy's cry. Henderson was just picking himself up from the floor, nursing his jaw with both hands.

I stared at the men, and my jaw dropped. They were my own crowd, men of the black gang. My assistant, Johnson, led them, and in his hand he bore a naked sword. About each man's middle was strapped a cartridge belt and a brace of revolvers.

I stared, and there came to me a lightning comprehension of the stunning truth. I opened my mouth to shout a warning, to scream at the top of my voice a message that Dooin in the life-boat, and mayhap the ship beside us, would hear.

One of the men behind me crooked his arm around my throat and choked my speech.

"Gag him!" I heard Dacy exclaim.

My head was roughly drawn back. Into my mouth was forced the gag—a piece of cork wrapped with a napkin, I soon discovered. The ends of the thing were drawn tightly across my cheeks and knotted together at the back of my neck. I was helpless; I could not utter a sound; for a few moments I could hardly breathe.

A low-voiced conversation was going on behind me, in which I made out Dacy's voice but could overhear nothing. Then I was roughly urged ahead by the men behind me.

We traversed the cabin, the cabin alleyway, and emerged on deck. I was choking, and there was a buzzing in my head. I was only half-conscious that numerous figures surrounded me. I was shoved and dragged across the deck to the side of the ship.

"Have you got them?" I heard a voice cry softly.

"Yes, here they are!" came the answer in Farley's voice.

My arms were jerked from behind me and forced around a stanchion in front of me. I felt the touch of cold steel upon my wrists, and heard a click. My captors unhanded me and stepped away.

Instinctively, I jerked my arms apart. They came some three inches. I was handcuffed to the stanchion!

"Pleasant thoughts, Mr. McNeil!" came Farley's level, venomous voice in my ear.

Then I heard retreating footsteps.

IX

I WAS helpless. The stanchion I was shackled to was one of the bridge supports—an iron "I," fully ten inches wide. By twisting my head, I could see for some distance along the *Ormsby's* deck, both fore and aft; and by twisting my body and stretching my neck, I could also peer around the edge of the stanchion and down upon the destroyer's decks.

The gag hurt me cruelly. I tried, but unsuccessfully, to reach my head around the stanchion so that my jaws and fingers would meet. I bit and chewed frantically upon the cork in my mouth, and only succeeded in giving myself pain. I was panic-stricken at the thought of the deed about to happen, and of my utter inability to warn the sleeping ship that lay before me.

Then I became still and waited with horror and despair for the thing to happen.

Stealthy footsteps passed and repassed behind me. It was a dark night, bright with stars, but moonless. Not a light was showing upon either ship. The *Ormsby's* bulk, towering above the *Wasp*, threw the latter's decks into black shadow. But, by twisting my head, I could make out many dim, moving shapes upon our own decks. Dacy's whole hell-crew was stirring.

From the bridge of the *Wasp* came the sound of the bell. Four bells—two o'clock! From the destroyer's forecastle came the gruff, subdued hail, "Four bells, and all-l's well!" and from the bridge, the boyish treble of the midshipman's response, "All's well!"

I heard Dacy's voice behind me.

"We must strike now! McNeil said two hours' pumping would fill her up. The time is up."

"We are ready for'rd," came Henderson's voice.

"All ready aft," from Ralder.

"Werner!" called Dacy softly; the German emerged from the gloom. "Take your gang and get to work upon the engines," directed Dacy.

The group moved away forward. Directly, a group of men crept aft. As they passed me I saw that they bore coils of rope and Jacob's ladders. They strung along the rail—dim blots in the night.

I heard Dacy's guarded voice again.

"Remember, light up at the sound of the whistle!"

"Aye, aye, sir," was the murmured response.

Three men climbed the *Ormsby's* rail and descended to the destroyer's decks. They made no effort at concealment, and clumped over the *Wasp's* steel decks.

"Who's there?" came the midshipman's hail.

"Came to look at your tanks," came Henderson's voice. "They must be about full."

"All right," was the answer. "I'll go with you."

The *Wasp's* officer—he was but a midshipman and a boy, I afterward knew—joined Henderson and the other two. They strode to the engine-room hatch and disappeared below.

What happened next has been the subject of much foolish comment in the public press. But then, a war-ship pirated and her crew subdued by half their number of cutthroats! Small wonder that being ignorant of details the press should wax sarcastic and the public skeptical. It seems to belong to another century—to Sir Henry Morgan and the Spanish Main.

But indeed, Roger Dacy was, himself, a very Morgan of a man; and the crew who followed him aboard the *Wasp* was fully as evil and desperate a gang as ever boarded a galleon in the olden days.

Because the Governments concerned have maintained silence, a grave injustice has been done Captain Montague and his men. The truth is, they never had a chance.

As soon as the engine-room hatch closed over the heads of Henderson, the middy and the other two men, Dacy and his crew commenced.

Fore and aft, along the *Ormsby's* rail, the ropes and the ladders were softly lowered over the side. Men swarmed down them to the *Wasp's* deck. It was done so silently and swiftly that I, watching and expecting, could but dimly perceive the motion of it in the darkness. The men of the *Wasp's* anchor-watch, off their guard and unsuspecting of treachery, were not aroused. In a moment the *Wasp's* decks were filled with swiftly moving shapes.

"'Oo's there?" came from the destroyer's bridge. "'Ey? My God— Ah-h-h!" The voice trailed away in a choking gurgle.

A chorus of yells, answered by spitting flames and the crash of revolver shots, a scream, and then a shrill whistle sounded.

Instantly, the *Wasp's* decks were bathed in bright light along their entire length. The *Ormsby's* searchlight was trained upon the *Wasp's* after quarter. The *Wasp's* own two searchlights lighted the amidship section and the forecastle.

What happened, happened so quickly that I could hardly grasp it. When the lights went on, the destroyer's decks were crowded with the *Ormsby's* men. A group were engaged in clamping shut the door to

the crew's quarters, forward, and some of them were shooting through the port-holes at the helpless men inside. Other groups were disappearing down the fire-room and engine-room hatches. A third gang, among whom was Dacy, tumbled down the after hatch that opened to the officers' quarters.

Pandemonium! From the forecastle came the yells of the imprisoned men, answered by revolver shots. From the engine-room came cries and shots, and the long-drawn shriek of a man going out in agony. From the after hatch, down which Dacy had gone, came more shots and shouts.

Out of that after hatch came a pajama-clad figure—the unfortunate Captain Montague. He carried a dispatch-box in his arms, and ran toward the side of the ship. He was wounded and staggered as he ran.

A streak of flame burst from the yawning hatch. Montague dropped the box, threw up his hands and fell forward upon his face. Out of the hatch leaped Farley, smoking revolver in hand. He ran to Montague's side and pounced upon the dispatch-box.

The uproar ceased as abruptly as it commenced, save that the men in the forecastle still howled, and the gang without still shot into the port-holes that opened aft.

Out of the cabin hatch came two pajama-clad figures, guarded by revolver-armed men. Then came Dacy, and following him four men who carried two limp bodies. The four staggered to the side with their ghastly burdens and threw them into the sea.

A gang commenced to collect the bodies scattered about the deck—the bodies of Montague, and of the anchor-watch. I gazed horror-struck. I counted twelve splashes as the sea received the murdered dead. Out of the engine-room came more men, prisoners and guards, and men carrying limp burdens which they gave to the sea. I counted twelve splashes, and was sure there were more.

Dacy gave some orders. The *Ormsby's* searchlight was switched from the *Wasp's* after deck to the *Ormsby's* foredeck. A gang of men, under Ralder's command, reboarded the *Ormsby*. They went to the forehatch and removed a section of the covering. Then, with drawn weapons, they stretched along the rail.

Then commenced the transference of the prisoners. The pajama-clad officers, and the men taken in the engine and fire-rooms, were made to climb the ladder to the *Ormsby's* deck. They were forced to descend into the forehold. When they had disappeared, the hatch section was replaced and Ralder's crowd stood guard.

On board the *Wasp* a parley took place between Dacy and the men imprisoned within the forecastle compartment. The forecastle door opened a scant ways, it swung outward, and three of the *Wasp's* men squeezed through. The door was slammed and fastened behind them.

The three were compelled to board the *Ormsby* and descend into the forehold, after the same manner as their shipmates. Safely in the hold, and the hatch replaced over their heads, the word was passed to the crowd upon the *Wasp*. The forecastle door was opened again, three more men emerged, and the whole process was repeated.

In this manner the *Wasp's* crew was transferred. Fifty-one men came out of that forecastle, in groups of three. They had no chance to resist. They were surrounded by armed men from the instant they reached the *Wasp's* deck until they were safely below in the *Ormsby's* forehold.

SUCH was the taking of the *Wasp*. Poor Montague has been charged with carelessness, and his men with cowardice. Neither charge is true. The men were given no chance to organize resistance; they were completely surprised. And how could Montague have suspected danger from the rusty old supply ship brought to his side by a representative of his own Government?

The *Wasp* had been three weeks at sea. To one who knows nothing of torpedo-boats or destroyers, this may not appear significant. It really means that for twenty-one days the men on the *Wasp* had been subsisting upon pick-up lunches and contenting themselves with cat-naps of rest. Those over-engined shells are nerve-racking, tiring places to live in at sea.

The *Wasp's* complement had been depleted through the dispatch of prize crews. When she sighted the *Ormsby* that afternoon, she had but seventy-three officers and men aboard. They had been standing watch and watch for weeks, and all hands were tired out. In merely posting an anchor-watch, and allowing the rest of his crew to obtain a night's sleep, Montague did what any officer with his men's well-being and comfort at heart would have done.

Nor would it have made much difference had a full watch been on duty. Dacy's crowd would have still outnumbered them, and the surprise would have been just as complete. It might have cost Dacy a few more lives, but he cared nothing for that. As it was, he lost just one man—slain by Montague as the latter leaped from his bed during the invasion of the cabin.

The *Wasp's* build laid her open to just such an attack. There are no deck-houses or other obstructions on a destroyer's decks. Abaft the bridge, on the *Wasp*, only the three funnels and the square hatches broke the flush decks.

The forecastle was high, and broke at the beam. Beneath the forecastle head the entire crew berthed. There was but the one door. The rest of the ship was compartments. A destroyer is just a box of compartments. There was no communication between them save through the little square hatches in the deck. There were no doors below decks—just sheer steel bulkheads, isolating each section.

Dacy knew destroyers. He knew how the *Wasp* was constructed. He knew that with the steel door to the forecastle closed, the major portion of the crew would be imprisoned. He knew he had then only to reckon with the few men in the isolated fire-rooms, the men in the engine-room, and the few officers in the cabin. The capture of the *Wasp* was planned beforehand down to the least detail, and the plot was daringly and ruthlessly executed.

THROUGHOUT it all I stood at the *Ormsby's* rail, handcuffed to the stanchion, a horrified and fascinated witness to the scene. The audacity of the act was stunning; the butchery that accompanied it nauseating.

I am not a squeamish person; I have seen many men go out, with boots on and with boots off. I, myself, have sent a couple across the line—but in fair fight, and for good cause. The heartless, cold-blooded thoroughness with which Dacy knifed and pistoled his way to victory sickened and enraged me. I struggled with my bonds, and bit impotently upon my gag.

My eyes were riveted upon the *Wasp*, but my thoughts would fly to the life-boat upon the skids above my head. Dooin! Where was Dooin? Why did he not do something? And then a glimmer of cold reason would touch me. Dooin! What could he do? Doubtless the little secret agent was crouching overhead, as unwilling a spectator as I to the scene, and as powerless to intervene.

The *Wasp's* men were all safely herded into the forehold of the *Ormsby*, and Captain Dacy's voice sounded from the destroyer's deck in crisp orders. The gang flew to obey. A number of them rushed below to the *Wasp's* engine-room and fire-rooms, and soon I heard the hum and the roar as the oil fires were increased beneath the boilers.

"Get that Englishman in the chart-house and chuck him into the hold!" came from the *Wasp's* deck.

Some of Ralder's men left the foredeck and came aft, climbed to the chart-house, and reappeared lugging an unconscious body. They carried him forward, and as they moved into the glare of the searchlight I saw that they carried Courtney's inanimate form. Poor Courtney, he had partaken of Farley's mixture, no doubt!

They carried him to the forehatch and lowered him into the hold. Then the hatch section was replaced for the last time, a heavy tarpaulin was drawn over the hatch and the battens were placed and hammered down.

"Werner!" came Dacy's hail from the *Wasp*.

Immediately came the German's reply from the *Ormsby's* engine-room door.

"*Ja*, here! I vas ready!"

"Then come aboard here and prepare to get under way!"

"*Ja*. I leave vun man to smash der dynamo!"

Johnson, or rather, Werner, slid down to the *Wasp's* deck. He spoke with Dacy for a moment, and then disappeared into the *Wasp's* engine-room.

"Get the boxes with the uniforms!" ordered Dacy.

From the *Ormsby's* forecastle were handed two big packing-boxes. They were hoisted to the rail and lowered to the *Wasp's* deck, where they were seized and whisked away into the latter's forecastle.

"Bring McNeil aboard!"

Men approached me. Farley's voice spoke in my ear.

"Well, McNeil, I hope you enjoyed the entertainment!"

The handcuffs that bound me to the stanchion were unlocked and removed, and my

numbed arms fell to my sides. With a gun tickling my ribs, I was forced to clamber the rail, and slide, rather than climb, down a Jacob's ladder to the *Wasp's* deck. I was urged across the deck to the cabin hatch.

Presently I found myself between decks in the lighted passageway of the officers' quarters. It was a fore-and-aft passage with doors opening on either side. I caught just a glimpse of a vista of disordered rooms, and of a great, ugly, black splotch on the carpet underfoot. One of my guards flung open a door, I was thrown into one of the rooms and the door was slammed and locked behind me.

X

I UNKNOTTED the napkins and removed the gag from my mouth. I spat the cork out thankfully, and looked about for water. My throat was raw and my tongue swollen.

There was a desk before me, with a water-bottle upon it. It was empty. I searched, and in the bottom drawer of the desk I discovered a siphon of soda and a bottle of whisky.

I guzzled the soda, and it brought relief to my tortured mouth. I also took a stiff jolt of the liquor.

I was in an officer's berth. The bunk was in wild disorder, and trailing blankets and overturned chairs gave evidence of a recent struggle. But there were no blood-stains about, and I decided that the room had belonged to one of the pajama-clad men now imprisoned on board the *Ormsby*. I set aright one of the chairs, fell into it and tried to think.

Before my eyes flashed the scene I had just witnessed—the attack, the surprise, the slaughter, and the stream of prisoners descending into the forehold. Piracy! Bloody piracy! What did it mean? The great war furnished a pregnant and obtrusive background to the picture. Was it piracy? There was Werner! Was it all part of a carefully planned German plot?

I looked at my watch — four - thirty. Three hours and a half had elapsed since Farley attempted to drug me in the *Ormsby's* cabin. It seemed an age.

I could not think clearly. I heard the clumping of heavy feet upon the steel plates over my head, and I reflected dully that daylight must be breaking. But I had not energy enough to turn my head to the port-hole. Physical weariness, mental reaction, and the soporific effect of the whisky I had drank, all weighed upon me. I stumbled to my feet, threw myself upon the crumpled bunk and was asleep instantly.

I slept hours, though it seemed but a moment until I opened my eyes, refreshed. The *Wasp* was under way. The vibration, omnipresent upon such craft, brought a rhythmic tremor from every plate and beam and rivet. The glow of sunlight diffused through the room whenever the port-hole lifted above the racing waters.

I rolled out and tried the door. Locked! I was still a prisoner. I looked at my watch. Nine-thirty! I had slept a full five hours.

I sat down in the chair and again reviewed the events of the past night. But though I brought a freshened brain to the task, and though my plight was pressing I could find no answer to the riddle. A twentieth-century piracy? Nonsensical! A German plot? There was but one German in the crowd, and he a subordinate!

But I realized now what my value was to Dacy and his crowd. I understood now his queries as to my mechanical ability, and his pleasure in discovering that I was familiar with torpedo-boat engines.

I was in the hands of a desperate gang who held human life cheaply—the night had given gruesome proof of that. There was no bright spot in the gloom of the situation. I did not doubt that they would snuff me out in an instant if I opposed them. I must go easy; I must pretend to fall in with their wishes; I must not lose my temper. My life depended upon it.

If Dooin were only at my side! I had faith that the little detective would find means to rip the bloody net that I was meshed in.

But where was Dooin? On board the *Ormsby*, if alive—perhaps his body too, swirled in the depths! The *Ormsby*! Where was the *Ormsby* now?

My gloomy meditations were abruptly terminated by the rattling of the door-knob. The lock clicked and the door opened.

A sailor, wearing the blouse of a British Navy bluejacket, and with a cutlass and revolver belted about his waist, confronted me. He spoke and I recognized him—it was Worden. He stared at me with a malevolent eye, but saluted with perfect gravity and spoke meekly.

"Captain Dacy would like to see you, sir. I am to take you to him."

I followed him into the passageway. As I traveled the length of the passage, I saw that it bisected the officers' quarters. The berths were to starboard, the wardroom and pantry to port. The ladder to the deck was at the forward end of the passage.

Worden led me up the ladder to the deck. I paused for a moment and swept the sea with a wide-circling gaze. Not a sail or a smoke-smudge in sight, or any sign of the *Ormsby*! The *Wasp* was alone on the sea, dashing northward, I judged by the sun, and at a good twenty-five knots. The sea was calm, yet the lift was such that I could hardly keep my balance; and the plates under my feet trembled like aspens from the vibration of the engines.

We went forward and mounted to the little bridge the *Wasp* sported. Worden motioned for me to enter the tiny chart-room.

DACY was seated at a table, an open dispatch-box at his elbow, poring over a queer-looking book—a book with sheets of lead for covers. This was the prize that the wounded Captain Montague had endeavored to give to the sea just before Farley killed him.

In the corner of the room was a second table, and upon it the wireless apparatus. Podd was seated there, also bent over a book—his beloved Bambers, I had no doubt. He lifted a lugubrious countenance as I appeared, got to his feet and departed, giving me a blank stare as he passed.

Dacy looked up. Gone were the pleasant smile and amiable manners. This was another Dacy, the true Dacy. His face was stern, his cold, inscrutable eyes drilled into me. He was the forceful leader I had sensed him to be from the first.

"Well, McNeil," he said, "I suppose you wish to know what all this means?"

"Yes," I answered. "What does it mean?"

"It means that you are embarked in the greatest adventure of the century! There is money in it—big money!"

"It is bloody piracy!" I exclaimed.

"If you will be reasonable, McNeil, you will be rolling in wealth within a week. If you are not reasonable—but we will not speak of that. I am sure you will be reasonable. Nineteen men went over the side last night. I would not like to add to the number."

The threat was not lost upon me. So nineteen men had died the night before!

"What do you want of me?" I demanded.

"I want you to be my chief engineer—a job of a different caliber from the one you had upon the *Ormsby*."

"I want nothing to do with it!" I cried. "I do not care to hang!"

"You have no choice," he said gravely. "If we hang, you hang. When they learn of this affair ashore, you will be mentioned as one of the leaders."

"What!" I exclaimed. "I one of your gang? Why, I was shanghaied!"

"I will be frank with you, McNeil. You are implicated as deeply as any of us. Your name was forged upon the *Ormsby's* articles, and—do you recall that when you came to yourself upon the *Ormsby* you remarked upon the odor of alcohol on your bunk and upon your clothes?"

"Yes," I said, startled. "Why?"

"We poured whisky upon you for a purpose. Before we left New York we were inspected by Lieutenant Haun of the revenue cutter *Beaver*—ah, you know him? And you were shown to him stretched out in the bunk apparently sleeping off a drunk. He mentioned your evil character to me!"

The devils! They had deliberately placed me in a false light before a man who hated me—an influential man who would cheerfully take oath as to my desperate character. Lieutenant Haun of the *Beaver* was the man I had tricked when the *Goboy* was wrecked, as Haffner well knew. Haun would enjoy the task of defaming me.

I used some very hard language.

"Easy!" the captain admonished. "Words will not alter facts—you must face it!"

"Yes," I agreed sullenly. "I guess you have me cornered. What have you done with the *Ormsby*?"

"She is behind us somewhere," he answered. "We turned her adrift with this ship's crew battened down in the forehold."

"How long do you think they will stay there?" I asked. "There are determined men and good mechanics in that crowd."

"They can do nothing," he replied. "We smashed the dynamo and dismantled the wireless, and put the engines out of commission. They can do nothing but drift about until picked up—and that will not be until too late to interfere with us."

But a warm ray of hope shot through me at his words. With the *Ormsby* above water, Dooin was alive! With an agent of the Department of Justice to attest my story, I need not much fear any net of circumstantial evidence that might be drawn about me. With Dooin behind me, there was small danger of my being branded as one of these gallows-birds. But I showed none of my elation to Dacy.

"Well," I said, "what is your game, and what do I get out of it?"

"Now, that is sensible of you to take it in that spirit," he replied. "You are to take charge of the *Wasp's* engine-room; and your share of the expedition will amount to about two hundred thousand dollars."

"Huh! Fine promises!" I retorted. "You must be flying high for a newly born pirate!"

"This is no scoffing matter," he frowned. "You realize that it has been serious enough, so far. We are taking a big chance for a big prize. We are after gold amounting to twelve millions of dollars. We are going to get it!"

I slowly digested this astounding statement.

"Where is it?" I demanded; somehow, I knew he was speaking the truth.

"You will know that in due time," was his response.

"But, good God, man!" I cried. "This is madness! These are not Captain Kidd's days—this is the twentieth century! You can't pull off a piracy nowadays and get away with it. They'll scour the world for you!"

"We have already accomplished the most difficult part of the enterprise," he said easily. "The gold is waiting for us, and our getaway is already arranged for."

"You seem to be very sure of your prize," I suggested.

"We are already in communication with her by wireless. She is waiting for us to convoy her—the fly waiting for the spider!" He chuckled as if the joke were good. "Do you see this, McNeil?" He patted the book with the lead covers. "This is the secret code book of the British Navy—a rare jewel for some people we could mention, hey? Captain Montague gave his life in a vain attempt to save it from us. It delivers the prize into our hands. We have been talking to her all morning."

"Then the prize is a ship—another piracy!" I cried.

"You will discover what it is soon enough."

"It is a dirty business," I said harshly. "How many more lives will it cost?"

"As many as is necessary," was his even reply. "A life is but a small thing, McNeil. A fortune is a fortune."

I shivered at the easy finality of his tone. He meant the words. They were the key to his character—remorseless, ruthless, unmoral. I knew he would remove me, if he thought it necessary, with as little compunction as he would show to an insect that crossed his path.

"Well, I'll run your engines," I said, "but I do it under protest. I'll join in the killing of no innocent person for the sake of gold."

"I don't care what you do it under so long as you do it," he said. "You will still have Werner for your assistant. He is a good man, but without much practical experience. Keep the engines running, and you will not be expected to assist us in any other way."

WHEN I left the chart-room, I found that the freedom of the ship was mine. I had half expected the gentle Worden to attach himself to me as a permanent escort; but apparently no watch was set upon my movements.

Ralder had the watch, but he gave me no other attention than a black look. I returned it with interest.

I ranged about the decks to obtain a full view of the ship. The *Wasp* was one of the large cruising type of destroyers, developed by naval constructors during the past half-dozen years. I had noticed a brass plate on the chart-room bulkhead that showed her to be less than a year in commission. She was about two thousand tons displacement.

Her battery consisted of four torpedo-tubes, two aft and two forward, and six rapid-fire guns of the standard British 4-7 type, arranged three to a side.

A group of four men were working upon one of the guns, and they worked as if they understood their business. They were being bossed by the navy deserter I had noticed at the wheel of the *Ormsby*—the man with the gunner's mate's rating upon his sleeve.

"Evidently," I thought, "Dacy has organized his crew upon a man-o'-war basis

and rated petty officers." A true guess, I soon discovered. The gang had left their carefree, work-be-damned manner upon the *Ormsby;* prompt, unquestioning obedience to orders was the rule upon the *Wasp.*

I looked about the deck for evidences of the previous night's fury; but the decks had been cleaned, and there were no traces of the fight. Finally, I dropped through the engine-room hatch, and presently found myself at the bottom of the engine-room ladder, gazing about me with satisfied approval.

I do not think any engineer could have stifled a glow of contentment upon surveying the *Wasp's* engine-room. It was a vision of cleanliness and order, of bright steel and gleaming brass. The big casings that enclosed the turbines were clean and glistening; a couple of oilers scurried about, alive to their work; the mingled odor of hot oil and grease and working steel met my nostrils pleasantly.

Mr. Johnson stood erect between the twin throttles, and as I crossed to him he greeted me with a smile.

"Goot morning, Chief!" His mild blue eye twinkled. "I hope you got der pumps fixed."

"Say!" I exclaimed, of a sudden thought. "Did you dismantle those pumps purposely, yesterday afternoon?"

"*Ja,*" he admitted easily. "It vas orders."

I saw another clever move in the plot. The dismantling of the *Ormsby's* pumps had kept the *Wasp* beside the other ship, and also had kept me from witnessing or interfering with any of the preparations for the attack.

"Well, Mr. Johnson," I said, "I suppose, like the rest of the crowd, you are hugely pleased with last night's exploit."

"Nod Johnson, Mr. McNeil! I vas Lieutenant Ludwig von Werner, vunce of der Imperial German Navy!" He took on a certain dignity of manner as he spoke. "I like nod to live under der false name, und der need for it has passed."

"Very well, Mr. Lieutenant Ludwig von Werner," I answered. "You certainly have a right to call yourself whatever pleases you. But I should think that an alias would be best for any man mixed up in this bloody mess!"

"I vas nod ashamed of my name—I vas a gentleman!"

"A gentleman's code does not include murder and barratry," I snorted contemptuously. "You are guilty of both."

"Vat care I?" he cried with sudden heat. His figure stiffened, and his mild eye blazed with an almost maniacal light. "I strike for *der Vaterland!* Der English vas mine enemies—dey vas der enemies of mine people! Vat care I for dead men—I care nod if dey all were dead. Me—I strike for *der Vaterland!*"

"Fine sentiments," I taunted. "But I dare say you will take your share of the gold this crowd is after."

His face grew red. I thought for an instant he would attempt to strike me.

"You insult me! You make me vun of dese." He waved his hand scornfully to include the whole ship. "I care nod—your words vas wrong. Yes, I help dem ged der gold! It is for *der Vaterland* I do it—it vas British gold!"

"Where is the gold?" I asked.

"If you nod know, I tell you nodding," he answered with a return to his accustomed phlegm. "You vas trying to pump me—I say no more. Ven will you relieve me?"

"Soon," I told him curtly.

I left the German and took a trip about the engines. She was a sweet sight for a discriminating eye—two big turbines for going ahead and a third, and smaller set, for going astern. I saw the reason now for Dacy's interest in turbines. Everything was new and spick and span. I made the mental resolve that as long as I was compelled to take charge of the department, the men would toe the mark and keep the beauties in their present condition.

I mounted to the deck and descended into the different fire-rooms. There were six of them, one for each boiler. In each I encountered the same things—the boiler steaming, the oil fires carefully tended, three men alert and competent in the performance of their duties. No need now to wonder why the *Ormsby* was overmanned!

At last I returned to the officers' quarters, and my room, as I already thought of the room in which I had been imprisoned. I was still clad in the grimy clothes I had labored in the night before. I searched for and found some clean dungarees, and donned them.

As I left the room again, and stepped into the passageway, the door of the room

next to mine opened and Mr. Podd stepped forth.

We were face to face, but Podd looked at me with unseeing eyes. When I had seen him in the chart-room, a short time before, his face had borne the look of one who was suffering acutely. Now, the deep lines were smoothed from his haggard face; his eyes were alight, a fixed smile was upon his lips, and he gazed straight at me and was unconscious of my presence. He seemed to be in a happy trance. I gave him "good-morning," but he stalked silently to the ladder and disappeared out on deck.

When he had gone I noticed Farley standing in the ward-room entrance, evidently drawn there by the sound of my voice. He regarded me with a smile that was akin to a sneer, and gave me a hail, meant to be jovial perhaps, which rasped my nerves.

"Ha, McNeil!" he cried. "Would you like a little nip of schnapps?"

I jumped to his side. I felt that some of the steam bottled up inside of me must blow off. I reached out and took him by the throat.

"You little rat," I grated, "I've a good mind to wring your neck!"

I meant no more than to frighten him, but some of my rancor and panic crept into my finger-tips as I squeezed. He struggled wildly, and a fearful look crept into his bulging eyes. I released my grip, and he sank gasping to the floor.

"It would serve you right if I killed you, you dirty murderer!" I told him. "Get out of my sight!"

He rose to his feet, nursing his neck. His face was suffused with an evil rage that succeeded his fright.

"By ——! You shall pay for this!" he swore. "My turn is coming!"

Even in his fury, he did not raise his voice. His venomous words slid out of the corner of his mouth in a soft, sinister manner. I took a step toward him, and he turned and broke for the deck.

I followed more slowly, and went on watch.

THE hot hours in the engine-room passed slowly at first, and then too swiftly. Idle hours for me, physically, but mentally I was on pins and needles. I gave myself up to my thoughts.

They were not pleasant thoughts at first. There are those who have called me a headstrong dolt with no reck of consequences. Well, I meditated upon the future then.

I reflected that I had made a bitter and powerful enemy in Doctor Farley, and I heartily repented my hasty outburst of a few moments before. I sensed keenly upon what a slender thread my safety hung.

I felt fear for Dooin. I had given the little man my friendship and liking, and the thought of his probable condition was not cheering. True, Dacy had said the *Ormsby* was afloat, and Dooin was on the *Ormsby*. But had Dacy spoken truth? I put nothing beyond Dacy and his gang. Mayhap the *Ormsby* was scuttled, and Dooin and the men in the forehold now food for fishes! It would have been the safer course for Dacy.

And with Dooin gone, what of my own position? If I ever regained shore safely, what predicament would I find myself in? Proscribed for murder and piracy!

For Dacy had so arranged that I would be regarded as one of the gang. Perhaps, in New York, I was already being called pirate and murderer. My reputation with the powers that be was none too sweet; I was a well-known filibuster. My wild tale would gain no credence. I would not have believed it from another man, myself.

I was not so much afraid of death; I had faced it often, and had been long enough at sea to be something of a fatalist. But the contemplation of the gallows as a means of making my exit was disheartening.

The wireless was talking overhead, crackling and humming. Dacy was talking to some one over the rim of the sea—talking to the prize, no doubt.

The prize! What was the prize? The swiftly turning shafts sang it to me, "twelve million, twelve million, twelve million!" Twelve million dollars—an unbelievable sum. What ship would carry such treasure? Yet, I knew some ship did and that the *Wasp* was coursing in her direction.

Dacy was talking to her with the aid of the British Navy's secret code-book that poor Montague had tried to sink in the sea. She must be a British ship.

British gold! Before my mind's eye came a picture of a West Street dock, and of a huge motor-truck with a covered load and four armed men perched atop.

"By heavens!" I cried. "It's the *Mauresubia!*"

The *Mauresubia!* It was three days now since I had stood before the dock gates on

West Street. She was preparing for sea then. She was loading treasure. It must be the *Mauresubia*.

But the stunning audacity of it! The *Mauresubia* was a thirty-thousand-ton greyhound. To hold her up and loot her was impossible—unthinkable. Yet, such must be Dacy's plan.

Thinking about the *Mauresubia* and West Street, it was perhaps but natural that my thoughts should wander a bit. At any rate, natural or not, they did. I forgot the *Mauresubia*, the *Wasp*, and Dooin and Dacy. Forgot I was the quasi-prisoner of a murderous band of thugs.

Three days! Had but three days passed since I stood upon West Street and talked to her—since I had seen her living face and heard her voice? Was it three days since I had met Mary Morrison? It seemed an age.

Yes, I, Donald McNeil, bucko engineer and woman-hater, stood for Heaven knows how long, staring blankly at a piece of polished metal, my hands caressing a withered flower I had taken from my bosom, my thoughts mooning mistily about a lady fair, just like one of those driveling, sentimental idiots you read about in books.

And I found this occupation exceedingly pleasant. So engrossed was I that I lost all track of the time. The first intimation I had that the hour for changing the watch had arrived, was when Von Werner appeared at my elbow.

Even then, I was not at first conscious of his presence. I was endeavoring to settle what appeared at the instant to be a momentous question—in what cheek did that adorable dimple belong? The answer was most elusive. Then I had it.

"Her right cheek, I'll bet my boots!" I ejaculated.

Then it was that a grunt of surprise brought me to my senses, and I turned to discover Von Werner at my elbow. He was regarding me with mild amusement.

"Dey vas so pleasant dreams you haf," he commented. "I speak dree times und you never awake. You grin with joy der while."

I returned his salutation grumpily. I felt somewhat sheepish to have been remarked in such a pastime, even though the German could have no inkling of my thoughts. I turned the watch over to him and started up the ladder.

"Der captain vants to see you, Chief!" he called to me. "He vas waiting in der ward-room for you. He say for you to come to him."

IT WAS late afternoon, and when I entered the ward-room the giant, Turk, was laying the table for supper. Dacy was seated at the end of the table, and Farley stood at his side talking to him.

At my entrance, the negro vanished through the door in the after wall that led to the pantry. Farley hesitated an instant, then followed Turk, favoring me with a malignant glare through his glasses as he passed me. I was alone with the captain.

"McNeil," he said abruptly, "I understand that you assaulted the doctor this morning. I gather you attempted to wring his neck."

"He brought it upon himself," I answered. "He knew no better than to taunt a raw-tempered man. He asked me to drink some schnapps."

"McNeil, do you fully realize your position?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean that you are acting foolishly. Whether you will or no, you are one of us. Why not play the game? What sense is there in antagonizing your shipmates?"

"They are no shipmates of mine!" I flashed. "I am glad if I have convinced them of the fact."

"You have," he said grimly. "There are a dozen men on the ship who would delight to bury steel in you. Your hazing has given you ill favor. And you have made an enemy of Farley."

"Are you warning me that my life is in danger?" I asked.

"No. While I command, your life is safe, so long as you obey my orders. But if you are detected in any overt act against my authority, you will be eliminated. And do not make the mistake of thinking that any hostile move on your part will not be noted."

"Well, you are the upper dog," I said.

"Come, come, McNeil," he laughed. "Do not allow your resentment to sour your disposition. Look at this matter dispassionately."

"Look at it from your angle?" I suggested with sarcasm.

"Yes. You might as well have the game as the name, McNeil. Be sensible and join

us and share in the loot. It means a fortune for you."

"And the gallows," I added.

"It probably will mean the gallows if you do not cast with us," he replied. "But we are not worrying about the gallows. The disposal of the prize and our own getaway is already arranged for, as I have told you. We have friends in high places ashore. We will be taken care of. Think of the prize!"

"Yes, I am thinking of it," I said. "I am wondering how many more lives this mad business is going to cost. Your prize is the *Mauresubia*, is it not?"

"So you have guessed that?" he laughed. "Yes, it is the *Mauresubia*. It will do no harm to let you know that now."

"Man, are you crazy?" I burst out. "The *Mauresubia* is one of the largest ships afloat. She'll have over a thousand men in her crew! How can you expect to get gold out of her?"

"Easily," he answered. "That is the easiest part of the whole thing—the taking of the gold away from the *Mauresubia*. I doubt if a drop of blood be spilt. If that is all that worries you, McNeil, you may set your mind at rest. We will get the gold. Come, give me your word to join wholeheartedly with us. Remember there is a fortune for you in it!"

A fortune in it! Yes, I remembered. I thought of the things I could do with a fortune. With a fortune, even dreams might come true.

Nor had I any doubt but that the gang had their escape carefully planned, nor that they would not probably make it. Oh, I thought of it, and I was tempted. And then I thought of the still figures I had seen huddled on the decks the night before, and their callous burial in the sea. Cold-blooded killings, for the sake of gold! I thought of the other killings that would probably occur when the effort was made to get the gold.

"No!" I exploded. "I'll join freely in no such game as you are running. I have killed men in my time, but I have never murdered! I run your engine because I am forced to, but I aid you no further—not if you kill me!"

Dacy shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he said, and there was real disappointment in his voice. "I would have liked you for a right-hand man—you would be trustworthy."

He sat a while silent, toying with something in his hand. He had been fingering it during the conversation—a trinket of gold, I noticed. Suddenly he addressed me again, his pleasant, confidential manner gone, his voice icy sharp.

"Remember, McNeil, your first move against me will be your last move!"

He recommenced his toying with the trinket. He looked at it, and of a sudden his face lost its harshness, and became wondrously soft. I stared at him with amazement.

He looked up.

"McNeil, why are you looking at me in that fashion?" he demanded. "Am I a ghost?"

"Why," I stammered, "you look like—you resemble some one," I faltered. Who the devil did he resemble?

He smiled with a sudden return of his good humor.

"I've noticed that queer stare from you several times," he said.

He was about to add more, when a sudden uproar in the pantry at our backs distracted our attention.

"Oh, Lawdy! Oh, Lawdy!" came the terrified accents of the negro's voice.

The door of the pantry burst open, and Turk tumbled into the room. His shiny face was contorted with fright.

"Oh, Lawdy, oh, Lawdy!" he gasped. "Dey's a ghost in de storeroom! It's one o' dem we killed! Dey's a spirut in de storeroom!"

"Captain, Captain!" came Farley's voice. "Here, quick—a stowaway!"

Dacy leaped to his feet and dashed through the pantry door. I was about to follow, when I noticed upon the floor the trinket Dacy had been playing with. He had dropped it in his haste. I stooped to pick it up, to save it from damage.

I straightened up and stood as one petrified. The trinket was a miniature portrait, a girl's face set in a gold frame.

It was the face of my dreams that smiled up at me from the picture. It was the face of Mary Morrison!

I stared at the miniature. I was too surprised for the instant to even wonder at its presence upon the *Wasp*. The sight of that picture made me dimly realize for the first time just how large a portion of my thoughts that beautiful face had occupied during the hurly-burly of the past three days.

Then came distraction in the shape of a voice from the pantry, raised in accents of earnest pleading.

"Ow, Guvnarh, don't kill me! S'help me, I ain't done nothing! Ow, Guvnarh, don't kill me!"

Hardly conscious of the act, I dropped the miniature into my pocket. Then I turned to face the procession that emerged from the pantry.

Farley came first, and behind him was Dacy, holding by the scruff of the neck a squirming, pleading figure. The captive was dressed in the white uniform of the British Navy, and he was thickly coated with flour. A ghostly appearing figure, true enough. Turk, crouching in the corner, gave a grunt of terror.

"Oh, Lawd, de spirut!"

Dacy gave his prisoner a shove that bounced him the length of the table, and then stood regarding him sternly. I caught my first glimpse of the fellow's face, and almost cried aloud.

It was Dooin!

XI

IT WAS Dooin—or his twin.

He cringed before Dacy in a funk. Clouds of flour dusted off his clothes. When he spoke, it was not with Dooin's jaunty, American crispness, but in the barbarous Cockney accents of West India Dock Road. It was Dooin's body, right enough, but the man was a stranger.

"Who are you?" demanded Dacy.

"Ow, don't kill me, Guvnarh!" pleaded the fellow. "Hi ain't done nothink to you, Guvnarh!"

"Who are you?" interjected Farley.

"Captain's man, sir," was the answer. "Hi was captain's man sir, an' doing steward's duty, sir."

"He is Montague's valet," said Farley to Dacy.

"Yes sir," affirmed the prisoner eagerly. "Hi was captain Montague's man, sir."

"How did you get into that storeroom?" demanded Dacy.

"Hi 'id there," was the nervous reply. "Hi was doing steward's duty, sir. When the fighting cyme, Hi run in the storeroom an' 'id in the flour-bin."

The little man recounted his inglorious retreat with great earnestness. I tried to catch his eye, but his attention was all for Dacy.

"Hi didn't do nothink against you, Guvnarh!" he repeated.

I decided it could not be Dooin—merely a remarkable resemblance of face.

Turk advanced from his corner and inspected the little fellow critically. Turk's fear was quite dissipated now he was assured the ghostly figure was human.

"Sho!" he declaimed disgustedly. "Is dat what it am? Dat li'l' runt? Lawdy—he done looked eight feet high when he bobbed outa dat flour-box, all white like dat."

"Well, what shall we do with him?" remarked Dacy to Farley. "Over the side?"

"It might be well," assented Farley.

"Ow, Guvnarh!" was the piteous plea. "I didn't do nothink to you, sir. In my bunk, Hi was, Guvnarh, plyin' ' 'Earts o' Hoak' on a mouth-horgan. When the fight cyme, Hi 'id. Hi didn't 'urt any of your blokes, Guvnarh!"

He regarded Dacy anxiously. Dacy's face was stern.

"Hi'm a prisoner o' war, Guvnarh. Hi surrender. We don't kill you blokes when we captures them, Guvnarh."

A glimmering of the situation seemed to strike him suddenly.

"Blimme—you chaps ain't Germans!" he cried.

"Never mind about that," said Dacy. "What is your name?"

"Harchibald Dooin, sir," was the reply.

The words struck me like a blow. I stared at him over Dacy's shoulder, and seemed to get just the flutter of an eyelid.

"We might make use of him," remarked Farley. "Turk has too much work to do, and this man is a servant. Let him help the nigger."

"Yes sir—Hi'm a good steward, sir," eagerly proclaimed the prisoner.

"Very well," assented Dacy. He shot a terrifying glance at the cringing figure. "But remember—if you make one crooked move, over the side you go. Understand?"

"Yes sir; 'kew sir; Hi understand. Hi'm a prisoner o' war, working for my keep. Hi won't do nothink against you blokes, Gawd strike me pink!" the little Cockney asserted solemnly.

Dacy laughed.

"All right, Turk, take him along with you," he addressed the negro. "Make him clean himself before you put him to work."

Turk reached out and grasped Dooin

firmly by the arm, and the two disappeared through the pantry door.

AND so, when Henderson presently joined us, and we all sat down to the meal, it was Dooin who deftly waited upon the board; a strange Dooin, with a timid manner and the outward appearance of a British seaman.

"'Ere you are, sir. 'Arve a bit o' this, sir. 'Kew, sir." This was the extent of his speech throughout the meal.

He flew between the galley and the pantry, and the pantry and the table, in his eagerness to make a good impression. He waited upon us like a man bred to the job.

Several times I caught his eye, but not a glimmer of recognition could I discern there. If it was a disguise, it was wonderful—a change of character, not of feature. Mr. "Harchibald" Dooin had me guessing.

After the meal, I went below to the engine-room and relieved Von Werner for a couple of hours. A busy two hours they proved, for the *Wasp's* speed had been increased to thirty knots, and the engines compelled my whole attention.

When I returned to the ward-room, the table had been cleared of the dinner débris. Dooin was nowhere in sight. Save for Podd, the room was deserted.

Podd slouched upon the divan in the corner, head on breast, brooding deeply.

"Hello," I said. "All alone?"

He looked up, and I was shocked by the expression on his face. It was an expression of hopeless despair, and his face was furrowed with deep lines of suffering. He looked utterly wretched

"What is the matter?" I asked.

He shook his head dejectedly.

"McNeil," he said, "did you ever have a million maggots feasting upon your brain? Did every atom of your being ever writhe with desire?"

I was too surprised by his strange words to answer. He suddenly leaped to his feet.

"If you had ever felt it," he continued, "you would know what hell is like."

He stood staring at me for an instant, his face working, his shoulders twitching.

"My God! My God!" he muttered in some inward agony.

Abruptly, he brushed past me and strode from the room. Then I heard the door of his room across the passage slam shut behind him.

But I had small thought to waste upon Mr. Podd's vagaries. I waited a short time, hoping for the appearance of the new steward, and then went to my own room. I looked about the room for a message, and found none. I threw myself into a chair, stumped.

It was Dooin—surely it was Dooin! It was merely a disguise, the speech and the clothes. But how had he reached the *Wasp?* Where did he get the clothes? Why had he not recognized me and at least tipped me a wink? No, it was no disguise, it was too perfect. But the name and the face!

So ran my mind. I happened to thrust my hand into my coat-pocket. I felt something hard and round, and I drew out the miniature.

I had forgotten about the picture, but now as I regarded it my thoughts changed their direction abruptly. I gazed upon that dainty, smiling resemblance, and my troubles faded from my consciousness. I was alone with Mary Morrison.

Her picture! How like, and yet how unlike the beautiful, living face I remembered so well. Yes, even in this portrait a laugh seemed to tremble on the smiling lips, and the eyes seemed fathomless.

Her picture! How came her picture into Dacy's hands—he a black-hearted criminal with murder on his head. Surely, the West Street girl had nothing to do with him.

Yet the expression on his face when he had looked upon the portrait had been an avowal that he knew her, and knew her dearly. What was she to him? What business was it of mine?

I brought myself up with a jerk as I realized that I was subjecting to a jealous scrutiny the probable acts of a young woman I did not know. And then, staring at the face, I recommenced my mooning.

"Hist!" came from seemingly over my shoulder.

I jumped and whirled about. The room was empty.

"Hist!" came from above my head.

I stared about me, bewildered.

"Up here, McNeil, up here," came in soft accents.

My eyes searched for the voice. Overhead, through the room, ran an air-duct, part of the ventilating system of the ship. It was of heavy, galvanized iron, about fourteen by eighteen inches in size, and it was affixed to the ceiling with iron braces. A

small, round offshoot from the parent pipe, some eight inches in diameter, afforded fresh air for the room I was in.

It was from this offshoot, as from a phonograph-horn, that the mysterious voice came.

I stepped close and brought my face on a level with the ventilator opening. Through the small pipe I could dimly see the bulk of a human body lying in the duct.

"Hello," I said. "I'm here."

"Good sport!" was the answer. "This is Dooin."

"Dooin!" I exclaimed. "Then, confound you, you're not a Cockney!"

"Guess I kind of got your goat," came through the pipe. "Couldn't help it—I didn't dare recognize you."

"How did you get into that pipe?" I asked.

"It runs past my bunk," he informed me. "There is an opening there, where it joins the pipe that runs along the other side of the ship. I crawled through and made my way along until I saw you. I didn't dare try to see you openly."

We commenced a series of questions and answers. I recounted all that had happened to me since I had last spoken with him, the day before. He told me of his own movements.

"I waited for you to come and see me last night," he said. "After they had transferred the stores, they turned out all the lights. I crawled out of the life-boat and hid in the shadow beneath it. I saw them moving around the decks, but I didn't dream of the job they were up to. In fact, I had come to the conclusion that everything was aboveboard. I reasoned that if those jaspers were going to pull off any crooked stunts it would be after the departure of the war-ship."

Then he told how he had heard Dacy's call for help during my struggle in the *Ormsby's* cabin, and had seen them bring me out and shackle me to the stanchion. But in the darkness he could not distinguish features, and since I had been unable to make any noise, he had not known what occurred. The attack on the *Wasp* was a stupendous surprise to him.

When they had commenced to transfer the prisoners to the *Ormsby*, the search-light was switched from the *Wasp's* after-decks to the *Ormsby's* fore-decks. That left the stern portion of the destroyer in black shadow. "I took a chance," was the way Dooin put it. He climbed down from the boat-skids, slid down a rope to the *Wasp's* deck and made his way below to the officers' quarters. The place was deserted, and he had secreted himself in the storeroom.

"But the clothes—and the accent?" I asked.

"Got them this morning," he replied. "The steward's bunk is just off the pantry. The clothes were there; they fitted me and I put them on. I knew I would be discovered sooner or later, and I had to mask my identity. It was easy. I've played the Cockney before."

I told him of my conversations with Dacy and my discovery of Dacy's objective.

"It is the *Mauresubia*," I said. "The gold is there and they are going after it. They have their escape all planned; Dacy mentioned powerful friends ashore."

"That's Oates, he means," commented Dooin.

"I don't know how they expect to get the loot away from the *Mauresubia*," I added. "But they can capture the liner easily enough. Dacy captured the British naval code-book last night, and by means of it he has been in communication with the *Mauresubia* by wireless. She is waiting for us to come up with her. She expects the *Wasp* to act as her convoy."

"They are slick, all right," swore Dooin. "When does the show come off?"

"Don't know. Tomorrow, I think."

"Well, I must hustle back to my bunk before that big coon misses me."

"But what shall we do?" I asked.

"Is there a chance to reach the wireless and send a message?"

"No," I answered. "Wireless plant is in the chart-room and somebody is always there."

"Then we can do nothing for the present," he stated.

"But think of what happened last night," I exclaimed. "My God, Dooin, there must be women and children on board the *Mauresubia!*"

"It won't do them any good for us to get our throats slit," was his rejoinder. "Do nothing rash, McNeil. Obey their orders until we see a chance to queer their game. Holy smoke! This is the biggest job I ever heard of. There must be a weak spot somewhere in their armor."

"And what if we reach the *Mauresubia*

before you find the weak spot?" I demanded.

"Do nothing," he admonished. "Let them go ahead and get the boodle. We couldn't prevent them anyway. Our chance will come to spoil this little jaunt. I can use this pipe here to spy upon every room in the quarters—be strange if I don't discover something we can turn to our advantage. But we must pull the wool over their eyes, McNeil. Whatever you do, don't give us away."

"All right," I assented. "I'll wait for you to make the break. Say, you recall that girl I helped on West Street? That blackguard, Dacy, had her picture in his possession. I have it here. What can that crook have in common with Miss Morrison? He must have stolen it somewhere. Why, she was the truest-looking, most——"

"Huh! No doubt, no doubt," grunted Dooin. "Well, I must beat it back to my little bed before my Ethiopian boss starts gum-shoeing after me. Remember, Mac, go easy. So long!"

The voice ceased, and the body in the duct slid out of sight. Straining my ears against the opening of the ventilator, I could hear, above the ship noises, the rustle of Dooin's body as he dragged himself through the pipe.

"Good night!" I called softly.

I turned to my own bed. I was almost happy. A great load had been lifted from my mind. I had faith in Dooin.

XII.

I WAS due on watch at two o'clock in the morning, but it was nearly four o'clock before I was called. When I reached the engine-room, I discovered the reason for the two hours' grace.

"You vill be on watch der whole day, maybe," Von Werner informed me. "I vill be otherwise engaged."

He left me a prey to all sorts of nervous conjectures. The intermittent buzzing of the wireless overhead added to my excitement.

As soon as it was daylight, I left the throttle for an instant and climbed to the deck. A swift search of the horizon rewarded me with a glimpse of a faint, far smoke-smudge in the northern sky. Our bows were pointed toward it.

My moment on deck appraised me also of a bustle of preparation throughout the ship. The whole crew was astir.

The "yo-heave-ho" of a crowd working aft directed my attention toward our stern. The hatch to the aftermost compartment was open, and a gang, under Ralder's command, was engaged in whipping boxes of stores and ammunition out upon the deck. I divined instantly that they were making room for a more precious cargo. Even as I looked, the gang began to jettison the pile on the deck.

Farther aft, a couple of men were overhauling the gear of the whale-boat which swung in davits, the only small boat the *Wasp* possessed. The United States Navy deserter was working upon the amidship gun, and I saw some live shells, nose upward, on the deck behind him.

I dropped back into the engine-room just in time to receive an order from the bridge to increase the speed. "Open her up and drive her," came Dacy's voice through the speaking-tube. I rang to the fire-rooms for steam, and in a few moments the *Wasp* was racking herself with a thirty-six knot gait.

A little while later, Dooin appeared in the hatchway above. He bore my breakfast on a tray, and nimbly negotiated the descent of the ladder with one free hand.

"'Ere you are, sir—'kew, sir," was his greeting.

He placed the food on the log-desk, assured himself that he could not be overheard by one of the oilers and continued in his own voice.

"There is a big, black, four-funnel steamer a few miles ahead of us. She is stopped."

"It is the *Mauresubia*," said I. "Waiting for us to come up with her."

"There are great doings on deck," added Dooin. "Those sports are up to some more slick work."

"What now?" I asked.

"They are parading around dressed up like Germans," he answered. "They are all dressed in German Navy uniforms. Dacy is swelled up like a Dutch admiral."

"Good Lord! They must be going to pass themselves off as Germans!" I exclaimed.

"Where did they get the duds?" asked Dooin.

The memory of the two big packing-cases I had seen transferred from the *Ormsby's* forecastle to the *Wasp's* forecastle, flashed

across my mind. Dacy had mentioned uniforms when they had been produced.

"They brought them from New York," I told Dooin. "They had them on the *Ormsby*."

"Well, they are all fixed up like Dutchmen, now," he said. "I guess those sports on the *Mauresubia* will get the surprise of their lives in a few moments. So long—I've got to beat it!"

We came up with the prize rapidly. Twenty minutes after Dooin had left me, I received a signal-bell to slow the starboard engine. I knew we were turning. A second bell directed me to slow both engines, a third bell to stop.

I swung shut the throttles, and in the same instant the ship shook from stem to stern from gun fire overhead—four shots, in rapid succession.

I leaped for the ladder at the first shot, and the concussion from the last one lifted the cap from my head as I reached the deck.

The *Mauresubia* lay close aboard on our port side, not more than five hundred yards distant. She lay motionless, towering above the water like a sky-scraper above the sidewalk. Her decks were filled with rushing, gesticulating figures. Both of her topmasts had been shot away, and the whole fabric of her wireless was jumbled along her hurricane-deck.

The gang on the *Wasp* was cheering. Each of the three guns in the port battery was manned, and the smoke still trailed from the amidship gun, where the Navy deserter had his eye glued to the sights. I looked forward. Up to our signal yard ran a ball of bunting. A jerk of the halyard, and it broke into the German naval colors.

Dooin had spoken truth. Every man in sight upon the *Wasp's* deck, with the exception of myself, was dressed in a German uniform. Ralder dashed past me, going aft. He was dressed as a German officer. Another man, garbed as officer, appeared upon the wing of our bridge with a megaphone. It was Von Werner. He bellowed across the intervening strip of water to the *Mauresubia*.

"You vas summoned to surrender to der Imperial German Government! If you do nod so, we vill sink you!"

"All right, all right!" came the answering hail. "For God's sake, don't fire into us again—we have women and children on board!"

Von Werner descended the bridge and hurried aft, followed by Dacy. If the uniform had metamorphosed the German, an even more startling change had been effected in Dacy's appearance. He wore the uniform of a commander in the German Navy, and his mustaches were waxed and trained into the fierce upward thrust affected by the Teutonic military. His iron features and his carriage were typical of the Prussian aristocrat.

Ralder and a crew of men were getting the whaleboat into the water. Toward them hurried Von Werner and Dacy.

The *Wasp* was drifting astern. A bell from the bridge called me back to the engine-room. For several moments I was busy with the engines while Henderson worked the ship back into position.

When next I poked my head through the hatchway, the whaleboat was bobbing at the *Mauresubia's* side. Dacy and Von Werner were ascending a rope-ladder to the liner's decks. The liner's rails were black with people watching the ascent, and the panic had passed.

Then, a bell from the bridge recalled me to my duties below. It was in this broken fashion, a moment now and then, that I witnessed the looting of the *Mauresubia*. Of what happened on the *Mauresubia's* decks I learned nothing until long afterward, when I read the newspaper version.

This told how the *Mauresubia* awaited the arrival of H. M. S. *Wasp*, upon the receipt of code wireless messages announcing that the *Wasp* was to act as the *Mauresubia's* convoy until she reached the Grand Banks; how, upon the *Wasp's* appearance she steamed close and fired into the liner, sending both topmasts by the board and wounding the first and fifth officers; how it was discovered that the *Wasp* was in the enemy's possession.

How Commander Von Schlossman and Lieutenant Von Werner boarded the liner; and while Commander Von Schlossman, in broken English, demanded possession of the specie in the liner's strong-box, Lieutenant Von Werner invaded the wireless-room and utterly demolished the apparatus with a fire-ax. How Captain Lorens of the *Mauresubia*, with the weight of three thousand lives upon his shoulders, and helpless before the menace of the destroyer's guns, could do nothing but accede to the German officer's demands. How Commander Von

Schlossman thereupon produced manifests containing an accurate description of the contents of the liner's strong-room.

How the German captain was recognized by one of the *Mauresubia's* passengers, and promptly took drastic and unheard-of measures as a result.

Of all this I saw or knew nothing. My duties kept me intermittently busy with the engines. Only occasionally could I dash up the ladder and snatch a quick look around.

I saw the *Mauresubia's* steam launch and two of her lifeboats being lowered into the water. Men from the whaleboat manned them instantly.

I looked about for Dooin, but he was nowhere in sight.

On my next trip up the ladder, I found the steam launch, with one of the lifeboats in tow, lying by our side. The lifeboat was laden with a cargo of small wooden boxes, bound with iron straps. There were not many of them, but their weight bore the lifeboat almost gunwale under.

The boxes were passed aboard, and Ralder and his gang received them with whoops and cheers. They dispatched them through the hatch into the after compartment, where they had earlier made room by jettisoning stores.

On board the *Mauresubia* they were lowering more boxes into the second lifeboat. The *Wasp's* whaleboat lay on her oars a short distance from the liner's side, and in the stern-sheets I noticed an alien figure wrapped in a cloak. But I was too much excited by the sight of the little wooden boxes to comment upon this.

They fascinated me, those little square boxes—all the same size, all bound with iron straps. To and fro, hour after hour, the launch steamed between the liner and our side, towing the lifeboats. Each trip brought us a fortune.

The boxes seemed innumerable. I never knew their exact number, but there were hundreds of them. Ralder and his men labored like demons in trans-shipping the treasure and getting it safely stowed in the after compartment. Expeditiously, and without a single hitch, the work proceeded.

Throughout the entire time, the gun-crews remained at the *Wasp's* guns and kept the weapons trained upon the *Mauresubia's* vitals. They were a deadly threat that the *Mauresubia's* officers did well to heed.

THE transfer of the gold took most of the morning. Not a surprising circumstance when you consider that more than twenty-five tons of the metal were handled. It was after eleven o'clock when a final, rousing cheer appraised me that the task was completed. When next I peered through the hatchway, Ralder's gang was clamping down the after hatch.

The *Mauresubia* was hoisting inboard her launch, and the whaleboat was returning to our side. In the stern-sheets sat Dacy and Von Werner, and between them was wedged a slight, boyish figure wrapped in a cloak.

I had no chance to witness their arrival, for Henderson's imperative jangle recalled me to my work. Soon, from my station on the floor-plates, I heard the "yo-ho-ho" of the men hoisting the whaleboat aboard. Immediately afterward I received the signal to go astern.

We backed slowly, and stopped again. Suddenly the ship trembled from the shock and roar of one of the guns. Two—three shots! The horrible thought hit me, "They are sinking her!" I left the throttles and leaped for the ladder.

Our backing had brought us opposite the *Mauresubia's* stern. Her great half-round hull towered opposite us; panic was again rife upon her decks. Her officers were wildly hailing from her bridge.

Our amidship gun still wreathed smoke, and the navy gunner had it trained upon a spot beneath the liner's counter. I followed the direction of the muzzle with my eyes, and saw that the liner's rudder had been shot away.

Dacy was standing by the gun, a pleased expression on his face.

"She's crippled!" I heard him exclaim. "With her wireless and rudder gone she won't be able to bother us. She'll make slow headway steering with her propellors. We may not be reported for a couple of days."

I ducked below again. In a few moments came the order for full speed ahead, and the added urge through the speaking-tube to "drive her." I had a full head of steam, and I opened her up. In a few moments we were racing away from the crippled liner at a thirty-six knot clip.

Three hours longer I stayed on watch ere Von Werner came. My oilers were relieved, and the men who took their places were

part of the whaleboat's crew. I was bursting with curiosity, but I could not bring myself to question them. But I could see that they were drunken with the thought of what they had helped do. The thought of it made my own brain reel.

Twenty-five tons of gold! Twelve millions of dollars!

Dacy had achieved the impossible. The treasure was his. Beneath our hatches were the little square boxes with the iron straps. Twelve million—a fortune for each man!

And, unbidden, the insidious thought crept into my mind, "You need but to keep your mouth shut and you, too, will have a fortune to spend. You, too, will share in the cutting of the melon."

But would I? Would I, who had kept aloof from the gang, be considered in the division of the spoils? I felt sure I would be. Dacy was a man to keep his word. He had promised me. Two hundred thousand dollars! What could I not do with such a sum? How pleasant life would be!

And then I thought of Dooin, and of the promise I had given the little man. I cursed myself for a knave for even idly dreaming such thoughts, and gave my full attention to my work.

The nursing of the engines soon occupied my full attention, without any effort of mind. The command came from the bridge to "shake her out—drive her till the rivets rattle!" I obeyed. I drove her until she shook from stem to stern with the vibration. I took an unreasonable, but to an engineer a natural, delight in my task and its results. Thirty-six, thirty-six and a half, thirty-seven! When Von Werner appeared to relieve me, I was getting a full knot and a quarter more than the builder's best out of the *Wasp*.

Von Werner had discarded his German uniform for his dungarees. Instead of his face being suffused with a glow of triumph, as I had expected, he wore a troubled look.

"I suppose you are overjoyed," I remarked. "You have got the gold, and are making the escape."

He shook his head.

"I was nod joyous," he said. "Der gold, *ja*, dot vas good. But der woman—dot vas bad."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Der woman—dot vas bad. Captain Dacy bring to the *Vasp* back a woman. She vas young, und a lady. I like it nod."

"A woman!" I cried. "Do you mean to say that there is a woman on board?"

"*Ja*. From der *Mauresubia* he bring her. She vas his sweetheart, berhaps. She recognize him und cry, und he bring her away. It vas [illegible] I like it nod. She vas young und a lady, und it vas bad to bring her together with dis hell-scum."

I did not like it either, though at first I was more curious than troubled. It seemed a devilish thing to bring a woman amidst these desperate men. I wondered what she was like, but Von Werner could only assert that she was young, and a lady.

By this time, the *Mauresubia* had long since been left beneath the northern horizon. The *Wasp* was racing southward, and when I reached the deck I found it difficult to maintain a footing, so great was the vibration from the speeding engines. The decks were wet with spindrift from the tremendous bone the *Wasp* carried in her teeth. Our wake was a lane of white water. The deck-plates actually heaved beneath one's feet.

But these visible signs of our great speed I merely noticed subconsciously as I made my way to the cabin-hatch. It was an old experience for me; I had seen it before, many times. I was hungry, and I bent my steps directly toward the ward-room, where I knew food would be upon the table.

Turk and Dooin were in the ward-room, and the meal was awaiting me as I had expected.

"'Ere you are, sir," greeted Dooin in his best Cockney-ese. "Just 'ave a bite, sir. 'Arve you eaten lately, sir?" he added. "Just tyke a bit o' this, sir. [illegible] to the lydy, an' in 'alf an hour a bit."

"What is that?" I said, as Turk passed out of ear-shot into the pantry. "Is there really a woman on board?"

"Yep, and a peppin, too," he answered. "She's a friend of yours, I [illegible]."

"But who is she—where is she?" I asked.

"Search me who she is," was his easy response. "She's a swell-looking dame, all right. She's in the Captain's room. Dacy turned it over to her." He bustled about, placing food upon a tray. "Say, I got some news. I've found out something that will turn to our advantage, I think. I [illegible] take this tray up to the bridge. You [illegible] I'll duck into your room and we'll [illegible] I've got something to show you."

He balanced his tray on his hand and departed for the deck. I applied myself to the meal, speculating upon the nature of the news Dooin had for me.

I heard a gasp, and lifted my eyes. The sight I encountered brought me to my feet with a sharp cry of astonishment.

Framed in the ward-room door was a woman. She was staring at me with wide-open eyes and parted lips. It was my dream woman—it was Mary Morrison!

XIII

"YOU!" she gasped.

"You!" I echoed.

We stared as if each were an apparition.

For the moment I could not think, could not wonder. I simply stared, mouth agape, and realized the stupendous fact that this girl, who had so strangely filled my mind during the past days, was again before me in the living flesh.

She advanced into the room, and as she came toward me I had the crazy, fleeting notion that she was but another fantasy of my mind, and that she would presently dissolve into the nothingness she came from. She grasped the back of a chair to steady herself against the uneasy motion of the ship, and I saw the pink of her knuckles whiten under the pressure of her grip. Still I stared at her, incapable of connected thought.

Her body trembled more than the heavy vibration of the engines made necessary; her bosom heaved unevenly. Her face was haggard, in spite of its youthful freshness; about her eyes were reddened circles. The great crown of her hair was a tumbled mass of gold. Yet the disorder but enhanced her loveliness.

Her eyes were moist—misty with tears; and in their depths I seemed to glimpse despair and a biting sorrow. She leaned over the back of the chair and looked at me intently.

"You here with Roger!" she said. "Oh—I thought you were different. I dreamed that you—oh, why are you all evil?" she finished passionately.

"You dreamed—you, too, have dreamed!" I babbled, grasping at the word. "You, too, have dreamed, and could not help yourself!"

"I—I thought that you——"

She paused, and I became conscious that her face was crimsoned, and that a frightened, uncertain glance was in her regard. Then her eyes grew hard and bright, and she spoke incisively.

"I do not dream of rogues. I had a grateful remembrance of your service to me. I thought you were a gentleman, and now I find you here with this crowd. Oh, I thought——"

She faltered. Two great tears rolled out of the corners of her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

Her words were a splash of cold water upon the face of my consciousness. They shocked me to a sudden awakening to the situation.

"My God!" I cried. "Was it you they brought from the *Mauresubia?*" And then, with the evidence of her person before me, I was aware of the inanity of the query. "The devil!" I swore. "By heavens, I'll kill the man——"

"Stop!" she cried. "Oh, the shame—already you would fight over me like a dog over a bone!"

"No, no, you misunderstand!" I exclaimed. "If that blackguard, Dacy, harms you——"

"Stop!" she cried again. "I do not know what position you occupy here, Mr. McNeil, but I presume that you are subordinate to the man you are vilifying. It is a mean thing to malign a man behind his back."

I stared at her astounded. The transformation was instantaneous and complete. She stood with head thrown back, and her figure quivering with resentment. Her words were hot with anger.

"But—but," I blundered on, "the vile cur——"

"How dare you!" she blazed. "Oh—I'll not listen to such a cowardly attack upon the character of a better man than yourself. You would not dare to face him with such words!"

She hurled the words at me vehemently, and with a wealth of contempt in her voice. Then she turned and rushed from the room into the passage, and I heard the door of Dacy's room close behind her.

For many minutes I stood, staring blankly at the door through which she passed, my brain numbed and stupid with the shock of her appearance and tempestuous departure. Finally I recovered control over my

legs, if not of my wits, and made my way to my own room.

DOOIN was seated upon the edge of my bunk, awaiting my appearance with visible impatience.

"Thought you would never come," he greeted. "Been waiting fifteen minutes."

"Dooin, I have just seen the girl," I exclaimed. "Good heavens! Do you know who she is? She is the West Street girl—the girl I told you about!"

"Oh, yes," he returned, unmoved. "Didn't I say she was a friend of yours?"

"But the girl—that girl!" I raced on. "They have kidnapped her! Think of the position she is in! Good God, man, what will——"

"Huh—don't you worry about her, Mac," he interrupted. "Dacy will take care of her—she's his doll."

I obeyed an irresistible impulse. I reached out and throttled the little man, shook him like a terrier shakes a rat.

"Hey—you fool! Easy! What are you trying to do?" he panted.

The gust of passion passed, and I relaxed my grasp. Dooin sank into a chair, clutching at his throat.

"Gee, but you are a sudden gink," he observed. "What is eating you, anyway?"

"How dare you refer to that young lady as an intimate of Dacy's?"

"Huh! Holy smoke! I didn't know that dame had your goat. Dacy knows her, I tell you—knows her well enough to kiss her, anyway. Hey—keep away from me! Try that again and I'll bust you over the head with this bottle. It's the truth; I saw him do it. And he moved out and gave her his own room."

Again the flame flared within me. I clenched my fists, but with an effort kept myself from seizing the little man.

"You lie—I say you lie!" I cried. "She is a prisoner!"

"All right, all right, I'll take your word for it," he answered. "I didn't know you knew her very well. I thought you just saw her the one time."

"That makes no difference," I retorted. "I tell you I know—I tell you she is a lady!"

"Gee, I didn't know she had you going like that," was his answer. "All right, she is beauty in distress. But don't you worry about her safety. I saw her and Dacy together, and he is her friend."

"I don't care what you saw. She is true blue, and——"

"Sure, and a yard wide. But say, don't you go too much on first impressions. They aren't worth a darn where women are concerned."

"Do you mean to intimate——"

"Intimate nothing," said Dooin. "I don't know anything about her. And anyhow, I didn't sneak in here to talk about her. This is what brought me here."

He pointed, and I noticed a cigar-box lying upon my bunk. Dooin picked it up and tapped it significantly.

"I have it here," he stated.

"Have what?" I asked.

"Mr. Podd's little peculiarities," he answered.

I regarded the box with uncomprehending interest, and for the moment the girl slipped into the back of my mind.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Dooin raised the lid. I saw that the box was about half filled with cigarette-papers, twisted into pellets.

"What do you think of that?" remarked Dooin, triumphantly.

He took one of the pellets in his hand and untwisted the paper. Then he offered the contents for my inspection.

"What do you call it?" he demanded.

I shook my head.

"Looks like flour—or snow."

"Snow—that's just what it is."

I looked at him rather blankly.

"It is Podd's joy-stuff," he continued. "There is enough snow here to make a man see rosy for a month. It's dope—coke—cocaine, you know. Friend Podd in on the junk. He takes cocaine."

I looked at the white powder curiously. So here was the reason for Podd's moodiness and flights of queer fancy. But how did it affect Dooin and myself?

"Well, what of it?" I asked.

"What of it?" he mimicked. "Say—did you ever have anything to do with a dope-fiend?"

"No," I answered.

"Well, when a man is on the junk—especially when he is a cocaine floater—he is a nut. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"No," I said. "I told you the other day that Podd was bughouse."

Dooin regarded me sorrowfully.

"She's stolen your wit," he bemoaned.

"What are you driving at," I demanded.

"I see I'll have to educate you," he commenced briskly. "I am going to impart a secret of my profession.

"When we want to get a guy, Mac, we look for his weak spot. A criminal always has a weak spot. Usually it is either dope, or booze, or women—sometimes all three. When you know a man's weakness you have a hold upon him. I spotted Podd for a dope-user the first time I saw him. I think I could name Dacy's weakness—a short word that begins s-h-e——"

"Stop it!" I interjected.

"Sure—and about nine-tenths of the gang could be reached through booze.

"Dope is the leverage we can use upon Mr. Podd. It is the best—or the worst—of the three. A dope-fiend is a slave, and anybody who can control his drug supply is his master—master of his body and his soul. Podd is an old floater; all the better for us. With his dope shut off, he will be as crazy as a loon and as pliable as putty in less than twenty-four hours."

"Yes, but what good will that do us?" I demanded. "We can't do anything. Podd is no sort of an addition to our fighting strength."

"Fight, fight—that's all you can think of," complained Dooin. "We don't intend to fight. Here is the plan: The *Ormsby* has been adrift all day, hasn't she? And we are near the coast, in waters that are crowded with coastwise craft. The chances are that the *Ormsby* has already been sighted, and the piracy of this craft made known. Perhaps the *Mauresubia* will meet some ship."

"The *Mauresubia* should be able to reach the coast some time tomorrow," I said. "She will make slow time with her rudder disabled. She will have to steer with her propellers. But she should be able to communicate her news by this time tomorrow, at the latest, even if she speaks no ship. Of course, both ships' wireless were destroyed."

"But the *Wasp's* wireless is in good condition," said Dooin.

"You mean to force Podd to send a message!" I exclaimed, as the drift of the little man's talk suddenly reached me.

"Ah—I see a glimmer of reason is returning to you," he said. "Yes, exactly. As soon as this affair becomes known, there will be plenty of searchers after Dacy. We must get an S. O. S. out some way."

"But what good will that do?" I objected. "We don't know where we are going—we have no position to give. The Atlantic Ocean is a pretty big place."

"Can't you make a guess?"

"No, how can I? All I know is that we were about four hundred miles north of New York's latitude when we held up the *Mauresubia*. We are bound south now at full speed. We are about three hundred miles off shore."

"Where will we be this time tomorrow?"

"Somewhere off the North Carolina coast if Dacy keeps to his present course. There is one thing I do know—we can't keep up our present gait for forty hours longer. This ship's steaming radius is 2800 miles, but that is at an economical speed. Driving the boilers the way we are now, the oil will last less than two days. But Dacy can make some 1500 miles before then. Nothing save one of our own navy's new destroyers could overhaul this craft."

"Then we must get one after us," said Dooin. "Dacy is bound for some place to get rid of the gold. We must find out where, in some way. I am going to use that ventilator-pipe again — maybe I'll overhear something. We have twenty-four hours to wait before Podd will be in a condition for us to approach him."

"You are sure we can force him to do our will?"

"I know it. I've handled dopes before. It all depends, though, upon whether or not he can get any of the stuff from others. I rifled the medicine-chest in the ward-room and removed all the morphia and cocaine it contained, but Farley, or some of the crowd forward, might have some. I don't think so, though. None of them look like drug-users."

"How did you get possession of the stuff?" I asked.

"I had Podd spotted for a fiend, and was waiting for my chance," he replied. "While the boodle was being transferred from the *Mauresubia*, my gentle nigger boss was improving his time by sticking close to Ralder and gloating on the boxes being lowered through the hatch. I seized the opportunity and frisked Podd's room. I found the box under the mattress on his bunk."

"Won't Podd make a row about it? They may suspect you."

"You bet your sweet life Podd will make a row! It is like stealing his life to deprive a snow-user of his drug. He'll raise Cain

—but I am going to hide the box in that ventilator-pipe, and there isn't any danger of them discovering it. And I'm pretty sure I can disarm any suspicion those sports may have that I'm the guilty gink. They don't regard me as a man, you know. I'm just a Cockney flunkey. I got to beat it now. I suppose that coon is already looking for me."

After Dooin's stealthy and safe departure, I went to the ward-room and hung about there for some time hoping for another glimpse of the girl. The room was deserted. Dacy and his lieutenants spent most of their time upon the bridge, just coming below occasionally to wolf the food that was ever present upon the ward-room table. But none of them appeared during my wait. Nor, what was more important to me, did Miss Morrison appear again. The door of the Captain's cabin, wherein Dacy had housed her, remained closed.

Finally, I returned to my room. I sought my bunk, and for a long time I lay there, thinking; not thinking of Dooin or Podd, or of Dacy or gold, but thinking of the girl.

Try as I would, and I did try, I could not banish her from my thoughts. In vain I told myself that her spirited defense of Dacy proved her to be at least his friend. But myself would not admit the truth of the impeachment. I recalled Dooin's words, and a hot, unreasonable resentment seethed within me because of those words. I told myself that she was a stranger, and my innermost self proclaimed it false and declared she was near and dear to me.

I contended impatiently with my own conceit, but her image persisted in my mind's eye; her face bearing its telling marks of suffering, her eyes tear-misty or anger-sparkling. Von Werner's words recurred to me, "She vas a lady, und I like it nod that she vas here."

Nor did I like it. She was a lady, yes, but what was more to the point, she was a woman in trouble. She was in a position that might prove horribly dangerous. It sickened me to contemplate her possible fate. She would need me.

My blood coursed more swiftly, and an inexplicable joy thrilled me at the thought. She would need my help. I registered a mental vow that I would meet the need.

At last my watch informed me that it was high time I was on my way below to relieve the German. I arose, shifted my clothes and stepped into the passageway on my way to the engine-room.

As I passed the ward-room door, Dacy's voice hailed me. I stopped, and looked within.

What I saw hurt. For Mary Morrison and Dacy were seated side by side on the divan in the farther corner of the room. His arms were about her, and her face was buried in his breast. Her shoulders were heaving, as if she were weeping.

It was not her weeping that hurt—it was the fact that she was submitting willingly to Dacy's embrace. Coming so close upon the heels of my blissful, knight-erratic dreams, the sight struck me with the force of a blow.

"Come here a moment, McNeil," the Captain called.

As I advanced toward them, Mary Morrison raised her head and looked at me. Her cheeks were tear-stained, but she had willed a cold immobility upon her features. Her stony stare chilled.

"McNeil, have you seen a trinket laying about anywhere—a miniature portrait of this young lady? I had it in my hands while I was talking with you last evening, just at the time that little Cockney was discovered in the storeroom, and I seem to have mislaid or lost it. I have searched everywhere without success. I value it very much."

Silently I drew the bauble out of my pocket and handed it to him.

"Why, where did you get it?" was his surprised demand.

"You dropped it," I said. "I picked it up."

"You picked it up? Then why did you not return it before?"

"It did not occur to me to do so," I replied.

The girl seemed to be blinking back the tears, but her lips curled scornfully.

"So it seems you are a sneak-thief," she remarked.

I flinched at the insult her words conveyed. Dacy regarded her with a surprised air.

"I have met this person before, Roger," she told him with a biting sarcasm in her voice. "He did me a small service—a service out of keeping with his present occupation. I dare say he is one of your very good friends?"

"You did not term the service small at

the time," I felt bound to retort. "And I may tell you that your Roger is no friend of mine. I am his prisoner here—as I thought at first you were. But now I see you are not in need of my sympathy."

Dacy followed our exchange with a puzzled regard that changed to a quizzical smile. The girl received my words with a face that slowly flushed as the purport of my words sank in. I turned and flung out of the room.

I looked back as I passed through the door. Dacy had his arms about her again, and her face was lifted to his.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

MADAME JUSTICE

by

Nevil G. Henshaw

Author of "The Black Violin," "A Pair of Mules," etc.

I SAW her as she was driving into the little Louisiana village of Landry. She was a tall, rugged old woman of the type—half peasant, half small planter—which abounds in the French parishes; and even at a distance there was that about her which made one forget the squalidness of her battered jumper and small, rabbit-like pony. When she came closer and for an instant turned her strong, resolute face toward mine, I saw that this something was the dignity of a great sorrow. I shall never forget her look. It was like exchanging glances with Fate.

After she had passed I asked the villagefolk about her.

"That was Madame Gerac—she whom we call Madame Justice," they replied. "It is only on this day that you will see her here. Tomorrow is her anniversary, and she is upon her way to the curé with money for a mass. She is as regular as the calendar—that one. Rain or shine, it is always the day before."

Later, and in the quaint patois of the Cajun, they told me this story:

EVEN in her youth Madame Gerac was possessed of a strong sense of justice. She was a fine, handsome girl, and she had many chances. Yet she did not marry early. Her lovers were all nice, manly fellows, she said, and there was little to choose between them. In fairness she could not make such a choice, and she would not marry only for a home.

Later, when Louis Gerac came along, she accepted him at once. She could make her choice now, she declared, and, although it was not considered a good match, she made it without hesitation.

Gerac owned a small farm some twenty miles from Landry. It was in a remote, desolate section, and the buildings were old. The fields, bounded upon three sides by marsh and upon the fourth by a small wood, were always wet and boggy. No matter when you plowed them, the soil would stick to the plowshare like glue. It was the kind of a place upon which one is fortunate to make both ends meet.

For four years Madame Gerac worked the farm with her husband, and in that time two children came into her home. Of these

children the first was born to her. It was a son, and it was given the father's name of Louis. Gerac, like most fathers, was proud of the child; Madame Gerac worshiped it. In affection, as in all else, she was not one to do things by halves.

The second child came into the Gerac family two years later. It was an orphan, the son of a sister of Gerac's, and at first its adoption met with much opposition upon the part of his wife. Perhaps, realizing her unfailing sense of justice, she caught some glimpse of what the future must hold for her. Perhaps it was only the natural jealousy of a mother for her only child.

But Gerac was firm. He could not abandon his nephew to charity, he said. Also it was good that the little Louis should have a playmate. Single children always became either dull or spoiled.

In the end Madame Gerac agreed, and the child was adopted. Its name was Paul, and its age was the same as that of the son of the house. Six months later, having exposed himself to the weather, Gerac took ill and died.

Her husband dead, Madame Gerac fell upon hard times. It was difficult enough to attend to the farm alone, but in addition to this she had the care and responsibility of two small children. Most women would have solved at least a part of the problem by turning the adopted child over to charity. When it is a question of mouths to feed, the difference between two and three is very great.

Madame Gerac, however, kept her small family intact. She would arrange, she said. Having accepted the care of the child, no matter how unwillingly, it was only just that she should go on with it.

It was now, with the growing up of the children, that the first great test of Madame Gerac's justice began. On the one hand was Louis, her beloved son, the one bit of her own flesh and blood upon earth. On the other was Paul, the outsider, the unwelcome guest, as it were, of a lifetime. Would not Madame Gerac discriminate between the two? Would it not be quite natural, even proper perhaps, for her to do so? Already she was spoken of as a woman of exceptional fairness. Had she been only fair, she might have made such a discrimination.

But Madame Gerac was something more than fair. She was just, and she did not discriminate.

Always, from the time of Gerac's death to the very end, it was the same. In their infancy the children received an equal amount of food, of clothing, of everything. As they grew older and took their places in the life of the farm, their work was apportioned to them with an absolute impartiality. Did Paul plow one day, it was Louis who plowed the next. Did the son of the house make holiday, the outsider might rest assured of an equal amount of time to be spent in his own fashion. And Madame Gerac ever made sure that this time was so spent to the last moment.

"No," she would say. "What is fair for one is fair for the other. We will have no Cinderella business upon this place."

Thus the children grew up, unlike in every particular. Louis, a slender, handsome lad, developed a lightness, an instability of purpose which was totally at variance with the iron firmness of his mother. He detested his work as much as he deplored its necessity. He shirked, he complained, he lived only for the pleasure or amusement that was to come. With a parent less resolute he would have been the most hopeless of idlers.

Paul was exactly the reverse. Strong and ungainly, with a huge, knotted frame, and features that were redeemed from ugliness only by their absolute honesty, he became from the first a model of industry and sobriety. No task was too hard for him, no difficulty too great to overcome. He cultivated the farm as it had never been cultivated before. Through his efforts the little family approached what would be for them a species of prosperity. And in addition to these other virtues, Paul was possessed of a sense of fairness, of justice, that was scarce inferior to that of his foster mother.

It was strange that Louis, the son, should be as wholly unlike his mother as Paul, the outsider, was similar to her in every respect. The neighbors commented upon it. Sometimes they even jokingly inquired of Madame Gerac if, in their infancy, she had not confused the children.

"Are you quite sure that Paul is not Louis?" they would ask. "If he is not, he should be."

But Madame Gerac could never appreciate the humor of these remarks.

"Paul is a good boy," she would reply, "but Louis is my son."

Such was her attitude. Unstable, worthless, selfish though he might be, Louis was her son, the recipient of her mother-love.

What she felt for Paul none knew, although it was said that she could never forget the unwelcomeness of his arrival. His industry might have inspired in her a feeling of satisfaction. It could have been nothing more ardent.

AT THE close of the Civil War, Louis and Paul stood upon the threshold of manhood. Thus far they had passed their days in quiet uneventfulness upon the farm. The fighting had been far away. Reports of it seldom penetrated to such a remote district. In Landry itself they could scarce have told you whether the struggle had lasted one or a dozen years.

With the beginning of reconstruction, however, the people of this peaceful country came to know at least of the dreadful after-effects of war. Heretofore their affairs had been conducted by officials carefully chosen from among their own kind. Now these officials were thrust from office, and their places filled by a relentless horde of carpet-baggers.

It was a time of disaster, of injustice and persecution. What the carpet baggers did not steal they destroyed. They laughed at justice. They flouted mercy. Their cruelty was that of the tyrant who has once been a slave.

The inhabitants were patient, but they were also human. When they could stand no more, they formed a *Comité des Vigilantes*, with which to purge the offices of their parish. In less than one week the carpet baggers had been driven into the cypress islands of the outlying sea-marsh.

"*Bien*," said the Vigilantes, and returned to their farms, but their work had only just begun. From fugitives, the carpet baggers developed quite frankly into outlaws. Under the leadership of a brave, resourceful man, who on account of his fierceness was called Le Sauvage, they emerged from their cypress islands to harry the country far and wide. And as these islands, flanked by a barren and treacherous marsh, were well-nigh impregnable, the Vigilantes found it very hard to retaliate.

Now more than ever was it a time of disaster. The inhabitants, immune from the four years' struggle, found themselves suddenly plunged into a mimic war of their own. Backed by their redoubtable leader, the outlaws fought like fiends. Each honest man was expected to take down his gun and join the ranks of the Vigilantes.

Madame Gerac, however, was of a different opinion. She insisted that Louis and Paul should stay upon the farm.

"No," she said, when the young men came to her. "It is all right to be a hero, but what about the plowing? For the present, *mes enfants*, you must content yourselves with fighting the battle of life."

And despite the troubled times, Madame Gerac's action was not criticized. She had struggled hard, and it seemed only fair that her children should be left for her protection and support.

"Justice to Madame Justice," said the neighbors, as they had already begun to call her.

As for the young men, they accepted this restraint according to their natures. Paul, slow, methodical and obliging, resigned himself quite calmly to the wishes of his foster mother. He would like to fight, he said, if only as a proof of his good intentions. His duty, though, must come before his desire.

Louis showed more impatience. He was young, handsome and dashing. It was his one desire in life to cut a figure. Each fight, each tale of personal bravery but served to increase his discontentment. His mother was mad—selfishly mad, he said. She could not expect to treat him like a child. Very well, he would show her.

And show her he did upon the first opportunity.

IT OCCURRED at the very height of the struggle, at a time when, accompanied by a band of picked horsemen, Le Sauvage was scourging the country as with fire. He struck and escaped with the swiftness of lightning. None knew where next his hand would fall. His scouts patrolled each road.

One afternoon, as they were returning from work, Louis and Paul discovered one of these scouts. The outlaw sat on his horse in the security of a small clump of brush, and, as was the custom in those days, each of the young men was armed.

At sight of the scout, Louis drew his foster brother down into the cover of the tall grass.

"You saw?" he whispered excitedly. "It is what I have been waiting for. Now we will show them whether we are men or not. If we lie flat and crawl, we can approach unseen within easy range."

"But why shoot him?" objected the less excitable Paul. "We are not Vigilantes, and he has as yet done us no harm. Trouble will come of it, you may be sure."

But Louis was not to be deterred from this opportunity of proving himself a man.

"You are afraid, Paul," he sneered. "Very well, then. I will bear the responsibility alone." And, putting his words into effect, he began to crawl away.

Paul thought for a moment and then followed him.

"*Bien*," said he. "If you are determined, I will go with you. It is only right that we should stand together in the matter."

They shot the outlaw from close range, firing together. The man, instantly killed, toppled from his horse without a sound. The silence, the simplicity of his death, was in some way terrifying to the young men. Had the outlaw screamed, had he struggled, it is probable that they would have rushed forward to finish him. As it was, they fled panic-stricken to their home.

Thus they failed to notice a second outlaw who had been stationed a little way beyond his companion. This second outlaw saw the two in their flight, but he did not pursue them. Instead he galloped off to report to his leader. Le Sauvage had a fondness for attending to such matters in his own way.

That night the young men made no mention of their deed to Madame Gerac. Paul, if troubled, was calm. Louis sought unsuccessfully to hide a nervous fear. After supper, making some excuse, both went out to confer with a distant neighbor. When they returned Madame Gerac noticed that their clothes were stained with fresh earth. Afterward it was discovered that, following the neighbor's advice, they had put the dead outlaw under ground.

It was perhaps half an hour after the young men had departed for their work the following morning, that a body of horsemen rode up to the door of the farmhouse. At their head was the huge, forbidding man whose name was a synonym for terror. Yet, cruel and relentless though he was, Le Sauvage—who had once been a gentleman—was justly renowned for his courtesy to women. Dismounting now, he stepped up to the door, removing his hat as he knocked upon it.

Madame Gerac opened to him at once. She had seen the outlaws from a distance, yet she made no attempt to escape. Indeed, if she felt any fear, it was most successfully hidden. The day was bright and warm, and already the blinds had been drawn against the approaching glare. Madame Gerac only shaded her eyes with one hand, as is the custom of farm women when receiving a visitor.

Le Sauvage bowed low.

"You are Madame Justice?" he inquired.

"I am Madame Gerac," she returned. "If they speak of me as Madame Justice, that is no affair of mine."

"And yet," said Le Sauvage, "if I may do so without offense, I should prefer to call you by the latter name. It will be more appropriate in view of what I have to say."

"As you please, m'sieu," agreed Madame Gerac. "And now for your business."

"To begin with, madame," said Le Sauvage, "I have always admired the reports of your justice. To this admiration you may attribute the security, thus far, of your home and family. Indeed it is probable that, with all things equal, you might have continued immune from my wrath. Yesterday, however, your sons broke our tacit truce. From ambush, and for no apparent reason, they killed one of my men. This man, sitting quietly upon his horse, was harming no earthly thing. Firing together, your sons shot him down like a dog.

"Now this, madame, places me in an unfortunate position. Had your sons been Vigilantes I might, for your sake, have charged their deed to my general account against that organization. As it is, I cannot overlook the affair. My men must be protected. I cannot have them fired upon unfairly by every farm lad who wishes to distinguish himself.

"So there is my case, which I contend is plainly one of deliberate and unwarranted assassination. I now have the honor of asking you, Madame Justice, to pass upon it."

A long minute passed during which Madame Gerac stood, as though frozen, in her doorway. Not for one instant did she doubt the truth of the outlaw's accusation. In the first place, Le Sauvage did not lie. In the second, she had heard the shots the

afternoon before, she had noticed the nervousness of her son.

"Come, madame," urged Le Sauvage. "I regret my necessity, but there is little time."

Before she could speak Madame Gerac was forced to moisten her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"I have tried to lie to you, m'sieu, and I find that I can not," said she steadily. "Your case is indeed a strong one."

Le Sauvage waited for something else and, when it did not come, he uttered a growl of admiration.

"*Dieu*, madame!" he cried. "You more then fulfil the reports of you. I so seldom run across your kind that I am going to mark the event by an unexpected act. I had come here fully determined to kill both of your sons and destroy your home. One falsehood from you, one plea for two guilty men, and I would have done so. But you have kept faith with your reputation, and I, who also am accounted just, will keep faith with mine.

"We have ridden through the night, and our horses are tired. Below us there is a wood. We will rest in that wood for one hour. From your two sons you will choose one to stand before my rifles. I will accept a life for a life, an execution for an assassination. Surely that is fair enough?"

Madame Gerac could not reply. She could only bow her head.

Again Le Sauvage bowed low.

"*Adieu* then, Madame Justice," said he. "Remember, we will wait but the hour. And let me warn you against any tricks. Our horses, though weary, are swift, and the Vigilantes are twenty miles away. Should I be forced to return, it will be to carry out my original intention."

FOR a little while after the outlaws had gone, Madame Gerac continued to stand in her doorway. Strangely enough, her first feeling was not so much one of grief as of disappointment. She stared out at the dilapidated buildings, the low, unprofitable fields, the few poor head of stock. How she had worked, and planned, and contrived, to keep it all together! It was what she had hoped to leave her son. She had toiled with this one end in view. And now, perhaps— With the thought temptation came knocking at her mother-heart.

Her children knew nothing of the visit of Le Sauvage. She had but to call them in, to dispatch Paul upon some pretended errand to the wood, and the matter would be ended. Or, again, she might even conclude the affair without deceit. She could call Paul alone, she could tell him of the dreadful dilemma. That he would go without question or complaint she knew well. He was that kind.

But she was also her kind. She was Madame Justice.

Slowly, resolutely, Madame Gerac recrossed the threshold of her home. Before her a short passage led back to the kitchen. Half way down this passage she had put temptation behind her. She arrived at her decision with her hand upon the kitchen door.

Once inside the kitchen, Madame Gerac acted quickly. Going straight to the shelf above the open fire, she took from it a pack of cards. It was an old pack, soiled and thumbed from the handling of many games. Placing the pack upon the kitchen table, she took from its nail the battered tin horn with which she was wont to call in her children. She was forced to blow thrice before she could produce a sound.

When the young men arrived, Madame Gerac wasted little time. She called to them when they were still some distance from the kitchen doorway.

"Quick, you two!" she began. "You killed an outlaw from ambush yesterday afternoon?"

Louis stopped instantly. His face grew deathly white, and his knees began to bend under him. Paul plodded doggedly forward. His eyes were troubled, but when he spoke his voice was steady enough.

"Yes, mother," he replied, as he had been taught to call her.

"You shot together—at the same time?"

"Yes, mother."

"The man was not harming you—he made no threatening movement?"

"No, mother."

Madame Gerac frowned. Evidently something was puzzling her.

"But why?" she continued. "I can understand such a thing from Louis. He, of course, wished to prove himself a man. But you, Paul—you are not accustomed to play the fool. Come, why did you do it?"

Paul's mouth closed determinedly. Louis crept forward, his eyes appealing. Madame

Gerac, however, knew her children only too well.

"I see," said she. "Louis insisted, and you thought it your duty to stand with him in the matter. Nevertheless you were a fool, Paul. Le Sauvage has been here. Also he has been just. Only one of you will have to pay. He has promised to wait an hour in the wood for the one to come to him. After that it will be both. Also the house. He has told me to choose between you, but I can not. You will have to determine the choice yourselves."

Paul nodded quietly.

"*Bien*," said he. "Then I shall go, mother. It will be better for you that way. It will——"

Madame Gerac did not falter.

"You will do nothing of the sort, Paul," she interrupted firmly. "The guilt is equal between you. The punishment must be left to chance. Inside I have placed the cards in readiness upon the table. You will each cut, and the one who shows the lowest card will go. Come, there is no time to lose."

She turned and re-entered the kitchen, with Paul following close behind her.

Louis followed more slowly. Dazed, stupefied by fear, he had thus far been unable to utter the excuses, the entreaties, that rose to his lips. Had it not been for this stupefaction, it is probable that he would then have tried to make his escape. As it was, his paralyzed limbs seemed to carry him unwillingly forward. Slowly, and with wide, staring eyes, like one in a dream, he made his way into the kitchen and took his place at the table beside Paul.

Madame Gerac did not look at her son at this moment. There were some things that even she could not stand.

"You will cut first, Louis, since it was you who suggested the deed," said she. "Afterward you will wait for Paul. You will then turn up your cards together."

Dazedly, mechanically, Louis reached over and removed a part of the pack. After he had done so his hand fell heavily to his side, the fingers fumbling nervously at the cards. Paul cut quickly but carefully, staying his hand a little way above the pack. As if warned by some hidden sense, Madame Gerac faced about.

Paul, without a tremor, turned up his cut disclosing a ten of clubs. Louis, with shaking hand, displayed a king of hearts. Madame Gerac expelled her breath in a long sigh, half of horror, half of relief.

As was his custom Paul had, upon coming inside, removed his hat. Now, replacing his cards, he reached out for it. With his hand upon the brim he paused.

"What is the use?" he asked himself.

But a moment later he picked up the hat. It was the triumph of habit.

Madame Gerac had never been a demonstrative woman. When Paul came over to her, she only kissed him upon the forehead.

"Farewell, Paul," said she. "You have been a good son to me."

"Farewell, mother," replied Paul, and turned to his foster brother.

Louis stood motionless, although he also had replaced his cards. Paul held out his hand. There seemed nothing that he could say. As the two clasped silently, Madame Gerac again turned away her head.

When Madame Gerac looked around a moment later, Paul was gone. Louis still stood in his same position, although now, with his body bent, he was reaching down toward the floor. At his mother's glance he straightened up quickly, furtively. A sudden rush of color surged into his face, and his eyes exchanged their terror for a look of sullen shame.

There was no deceiving Madame Gerac in the matter of her children. She knew their every mood. Not for one moment had she sought to blind herself to the evident cowardice of her son. Now that he was safe, however, it was hardly natural that he should have the appearance of a whipped dog.

Slowly, mercilessly, Madame Gerac raked her son with her gaze, noting the flushed cheeks, the furtive eyes, the sullen mouth. Then, as she looked below the level of his waist, her lips suddenly tightened. That right leg, why was it held so rigidly? That right foot, why was it planted with so much firmness? And whence came that dull glint of white beneath the tight-pressed heel?

With one, swift movement Madame Gerac was at her son's side. With another she had thrust him away. Then, stooping, she picked up the card. It was a deuce of spades, grimy and torn, and marked now with the crescent-like impression of a heel.

"*Dieu!*" gasped Madame Gerac, and groped blindly for a chair.

After she had sunk into it she regained

control of herself. Her eyes flashed as she held up the card.

"Explain!" she cried in a dreadful voice.

Louis knew that tone. It was one that could not be denied. Trembling, sobbing, he fell upon his knees at his mother's side, burying his face in her lap.

"Forgive me, mother, forgive me," he pleaded. "I could not go. I wanted so to live. With Paul it was different. He offered himself at the first. He knew——"

"Explain!" cried Madame Gerac. "Explain before it is too late."

"It was after I had cut," sobbed Louis. "I was holding the cards at my side. I knew the pack well, I had noticed that the deuce was torn. When I felt the tear I dropped the deuce to the floor, and set my heel upon it. I had no idea of what the next card would be. I swear to you that I did not know it was a king. It was only a small advantage, and I took it, well knowing that Paul was willing to go."

For just one moment Madame Gerac permitted her hand to rest upon the bowed head of her son.

"My poor Louis," she murmured, half in pity, half in contempt.

Then she rose quickly to her feet.

"Come!" said she. "You may yet be in time."

Louis shrank back. The color drained from his face, leaving it white again. Small dots of perspiration appeared upon his brow.

"Mother! Mother!" he gasped. "You can not mean it."

"Come!" repeated Madame Gerac. This time it was a command.

Louis crouched behind the table. He was like a rat in a trap. His lips curled threateningly, and an ugly light came into his eyes.

"I will not go, I tell you," he snarled. "My life is my own. You had best take care, even though you are my mother."

Madame Gerac gave him not so much as a glance. Instead she sprang to the corner where, upon coming inside, the young men had leaned their weapons. An instant later she had whirled about, gun in hand.

"Quick, Louis!" she demanded. "Shall it be here or there? You have lost, have you not? Then you will pay me, or you will pay Le Sauvage, or, if you are too late, you will pay Paul."

She advanced upon him suddenly, forcing him toward the door.

"*Dieu!*" she burst out as she drove him through it. "It is bad enough for you to be a coward, although I can stand that. But to be dishonest—no."

And she added as she hurried him forward:

"Do not try what is in your mind. I shall not allow you to escape. If you take to your heels, you will not get a dozen yards."

IT WAS a strange pair that went down toward the wood—the son stumbling along before, his eyes wild, his lips babbling forth an unheeded stream of supplication, the mother stalking grimly behind, her gun thrust forward as a goad, her face a mask of silent agony. One glance she gave along the path that separated the farm from the wood, only to find it empty. Although but little time had elapsed since the cutting of the cards, Paul had already disappeared beyond the line of trees.

"Faster!" ordered Madame Gerac, quickening her pace. Louis, looking back into the muzzle of the gun, broke into a long, shuffling stride.

When they were some fifty yards from their goal, a brisk sound of rifle fire rattled out from among the trees. Madame Gerac paused as abruptly as if it were she who had been shot. Lowering her gun she made the sign of the cross.

Louis paused also, but only for an instant. With the first crash of the volley he had made up his mind. Before him lay certain death. Behind, it might not be so sure. After all, she was his mother. Perhaps, for the first time, she might not live up to her word.

As Louis, bending low, ran for his life, Madame Gerac raised her gun. She was a most excellent shot. She did not hesitate.

AND so, gaunt, silent, and tragic, Madame Gerac comes each year to Landry. Always it is upon the day before her anniversary, and always she brings money for a mass. Also, the village-folk inform me, she is impartial to the end. Always the mass is for the two.

"FURRINERS"

by

Harold Titus

Author of "An Event."

IT WAS no fight. Neither—knowing "Baldy" Brown—was it the sickening triumph of a bully. It was just a natural reaction, only the inevitable boiling-over of that spirit which was once so typical but which is now ebbing so rapidly from Michigan lumber-camps: the popping of a safety-valve, which resulted in bruised faces and battered bodies, minor results compared to what might have happened had there been no outlet before the emotion gained that strength at which it would burst all bonds.

He went from one end of the bunk-house to the other, roaring as a storm, flinging his thick arms with the vigor of drive-rods, demolishing with a final swing the crude chair that had put three of them flat; kicking, clutching, striking, swearing. And they scurried from him, those Slavs. Not one of them wanted to stand, so those who were bruised and beaten were only the ones who tarried too long in his path.

Such men could give no battle to Baldy Brown, with his six foot three and his two hundred ten—all lithe, pliable muscle on sturdy bone—and his woods training. A blow, sometimes two, at the most three, sufficed; they were whipped in a breath. And he roared his way onward, daring them to stand.

So, I repeat, it was no fight.

They were foreigners, and the first of their kind with whom Baldy Brown had ever been forced to work. Up there on the south shore European labor was making its initial appearance in lumber-camps, marking the final passing of that swashbuckling clan which lent romance to the devastation of forests. And Baldy, one of the last of his kind, could not bear it.

He had stood much in his time; stood the coming of a milder breed of bosses, the going on of scores of companions, the arrival of a less stanch army of native stock. But when they put him to bunk and eat and work with foreigners who would not do a man's work and who could not make a man's fight—well, something had to break! For in the woods a man's capacity for manual accomplishment and blow-for-blow conflict is the measure of his value to the race; and wo to him who shirks!

These men shirked and on them Baldy Brown, accepted over a hundred-mile radius as a true woodsman, had breathed his damning judgment.

"Th' furriners!" he'd mutter under his breath. "Th' low-down furriners!" Failing in his classification to remember that he had toiled and brawled side by side with French and Scotch in his hey-days. "They ain't a man among 'em! Furriners!"

Then the limit; and unprovoked by word or look he bellowed his warning and charged through them, vision red, finding relief in the way he knew. From the tortured soul of one man comes a great symphony; from another, a master poem or picture; when Baldy Brown's innermost being writhed there could be no relief other then his knotted fists meeting flesh.

Knowing him, then, the affair could not be characterized by the spirit of the bully.

And when he had gone from the farthest shadow clear down to the door at the other end of the building, Brown turned and looked back. From their bunks the half-dozen other old-timers laughed indulgently at the astounded men of another race-strain who cowered from the storm turned on them.

"Furriners!" yelled Baldy Brown in a voice choked with honest rage. "Furriners! Ain't they a man among yez? Won't one o' yez please stand up an' hit me, so I can kill him?"

He took a half-dozen steps toward them again and those nearest him stirred, as if to retreat.

"Yeah!" he scoffed, and stopped. "Furriners!"

Then he wheeled, opened the door and slammed it behind him, going into the night.

IT WAS a haggard, bruised Baldy Brown who three weeks later awoke sober in Cheboygan. He had warped memories of a dozen fights in as many towns; of nights passed in different camps where the presence of alien labor always drove him on to another trip by rail or rutted road until he came to himself, broke, shaken, in the lower peninsula, with Winter at its worst.

But Winter at its worst really meant at its best, for logging was on and men like Baldy Brown—known by the set of their jaws and the swing of their shoulders to every camp-boss in the Great Lakes country—are always in demand. He hired out in a saloon, got a drink and a ticket, and climbed into the smoker of the dingy accommodation-train which was to worry its way westward through the drifts.

Of the man who bought his services Brown asked but one question, and asked it seriously, weightily, confidentially. And the other, sizing the big chap up, laughed and said hurriedly:

"Furriners? Aw, th' crew's all white."

That much settled, Baldy was content to sleep and wait until the conductor ordered him off.

It was noon and thawing a bit when he stepped out into the snow and struck up the road to which he was directed. His heart was light, for behind he was leaving bad memories. He had little idea of what might await him in this camp on Loon Lake, but camps are all much alike and he reveled in the memory of the assurance given him that the crew was *white*. Such was sufficient to warm his soul.

"Here comes a *jack*," growled the cook to the cookee as he saw Brown swing into camp just before dusk. "You can tell 'em far's you can see," he added a bit grimly. For he was an old cook and, too, cherished memories of the men who were worthy of the grub he set out.

Baldy sniffed deeply the tainted air of the bunks as he shoved open the door and stepped into the room. A bit of a sentimentalist was this big-chested son of the timber lands, and the odors were good to his nostrils. He was glad to be back. He had had his drunk; work was before him and in the facts he took the joy of the lumberjack. Also, the crew was of white men, his breed. It was like a home-coming.

And the disappointment was doubled when the crew came in. He heard and detected a difference in their voices before the door opened. He knew they spoke a foreign tongue and for the instant before rage came, the men felt sick at heart.

But he held his peace and kept the disgust to himself. Something of a fatalist, perhaps, was in him. Anyhow, he held his gaze to his plate at supper, went to his bunk from the table and, putting his face close to the log wall, muttered contemptuously as sleep came:

"Furriners! They ain't—white!"

BALDY, for reasons unknown to himself, tried to forget the situation. The boss put him top-loading and he labored lustily throughout the day, thinking of the near future when his muscles would be right again and he could hit the old killing pace. It was good to be at work, handling tackle, seeing things move, in spite of the fact that the old energy which used to accomplish the big things in logging-camps was not in evidence.

At night he was silent again, and again under blankets before the whole crew had finished eating. He was facing the inevitable; he began to understand. Foreigners had come to stay, were penetrating every corner of the woods. It made him restless, with a species of homesickness, and the realization took from him for the moment that lust to break and maim, made him gentler in a morose sort of way. Incentive to fight comes only with having *men* to whip.

Baldy followed the bent of old customs, established when bosses did not drive men in lumber-camps but busied themselves in search of tasks for the work-gluttons who toiled in the crews. The same condition that had made him revolt up there in the Superior country prevailed here. The crew lagged, had to be pushed from start to quitting time. Not a man of them took pride in his work; not a stroke was made in healthy competition; their final object was to remain on the pay-roll.

But Brown's example went for nothing. A handful of younger natives saw and admitted his prowess in a listless sort of way. That hurt him, but not with the sting engendered by the utter indifference of the Poles who made up the bulk of the crew.

Worse than the failure to inspire effort in those about him was the fact that their slovenly progress made it impossible for the big fellow to maintain his regular pace. Teamsters were slow, others bungled. He could work like the furies for thirty minutes, perhaps, then wait for something to do. It was exasperating, indeed!

"They won't fight; they won't work! They ain't men!" he muttered over and over.

He'd have laughed, then, had any one told him that perhaps down in those men was the spark waiting to be touched and bring out their vigor. That would have been beyond his comprehension. He could see things only in his way—which is a fault of many big men.

One little Pole, a teamster, was a particular irritant to Baldy Brown. He was small, he was quiet, he was timid and slow, and could not stand the cold.

"Yez can't even raise hair on yer face!" Brown cried the first time his temper rose above control, and flung a scornful gesture at the diminutive teamster whose thin, blood mustache held two tiny icicles.

And so malevolent was his glaring that the Slav winced as from a blow and looked over his shoulder with concern as he drove away.

From then on Baldy's outbursts were frequent, and with each tirade the evident fear of the Poles mounted. The situation became almost like that of a wolf threatening sheep—the way they drew together and listened mutely while he swore and threatened.

"Yez ain't men!" he would chant. "They ain't a day's work or a fight in yez! Yez ain't men!"

The little teamster with the puny mustache was a particular mark for Brown's abuse. They faced one another at table and the big top-loader glared such hate that the other was frigthened out of eating; they met in the bunk-house and Baldy raised both hands slowly as if to crush the Pole with his bodily weight, but stopped the movement with a taunting laugh as the little chap slunk away.

Yes, it was bullying then. Not the bullying of one man, not the singling out of him because he was small. But because he typified, to Brown, all that was disgusting about his kind and because the spleen which grew in the lumber-jack there among the men from across salt water must find a vent.

"Furriners, yez!" he shouted from his bunk one night and shut a sudden silence on the room. "No grit an' no work in yez! Yez can't learn nothin'—can't *learn* to work! Furriners!"

Then he flopped back into the shadows and tossed through a short night.

THEY awoke to a forty-below morning, with the buildings and trees and very dry air snapping and booming in complaint, while the long, ripping screeches of the frozen lake gave stronger effect to the symphony of extreme temperature. But Baldy Brown's temper was not chilled. It glared at white heat and as he hung low over his plate at breakfast a malicious gaze roved up and down the row of faces before him, while his fingers clenched with a vicious grip the handle of his knife.

Just the sounds of feeding. Not a spoken word, as is the rule at camp meals. So it was more than astonishing when he sprang to his feet, rested both hands on the edge of the table, leaned far forward and, measuring the words to let them sink in, bellowed:

"Yez can't work, yez can't fight, yez can't *learn!* Ain't they a furriner among yez who'll fight me—wit' five more to help him?" He shook his fist at the little teamster. "Ain't they twenty? I'll bust yer heads for yez, I'll do that! An' I'll thank yez fer tryin' to kill me!

"Naw—they ain't furriners enough in th' world to jump a white man! Yez don't know how—an' yez can't learn—*nothin'!*"

And of course, after that outburst there was only one thing to do. With his cheek

in his pocket Baldy sat by the bunk-house stove and waited for daylight, muttering to himself and moving his big feet restlessly.

"It's hard," he told the cook as he buttoned his mackinaw and started for the door. "A man can't find a camp where he can do a day's work. I don't want to quit but what you goin' to do? Huh? Furriners!

"A man can't find a camp where it's fit to live!" he flung over his shoulder as he set out into the tingling morning, off through the strip of timber to the edge of the lake where the road crossed a mile-wide arm on fifteen inches of ice.

Baldy's heart was heavy as he went along, swinging his arms now and then to keep the blood going. He did not mind forty below; that was a part of his life. But for the first time in his experience he was knowing sorrow; not because he was out of a job and headed nowhere, for that, too, was part of his life, but because, for all he knew, there was not a camp between him and Superior where he could find a crew of natives. And if he could not find a camp, where was he to go? He felt evicted.

The sensations he experienced kept his eyes on the snow before him so he did not see the gray team approaching across the level lake surface when he stepped out of the timber. He was wondering what he would do when he had covered the dozen miles to the railroad station. And after arriving at the conclusion that he had not a plan to his name, his gaze went up, out across the white lake canopied by the fog of frost particles through which the sunlight struggled. He saw the grays, then; and saw the driver walking beside them to keep from freezing. His step faltered and the fingers within the thick mitten clenched. For it was the one gray team of the camp and the teamster was the little Pole!

"Th' furriner!" he said aloud and quickened his pace—just to take one good parting paste at the little man.

It was much too cold for riding, so the Pole had dropped from his load and trudged beside the sleigh. The grays strained against the friction that frost makes when two thousand feet of hardwood bear down on the runners, and their progress was slow. Still, in his heavy clothing, it was an effort for the walker to keep up.

The team gave him no concern. They would obey at a word. But after every few steps his eyes sought a rope which was flung over the top of the load and ran down to the pole. That was the trip-rope to his gooseneck. A gooseneck is a contrivance to which the eveners are attached; a jerk from the rope will release it and set the horses free. It is an essential where heavy hauls are made across ice, for even the best ice will fail at times, logs settle deep into the water and unless the horses are freed they will be dragged to a drowning with a rapidity that is horrible.

THE Pole had felt uncomfortable about that trip-rope ever since the grays settled to the pull across the lake; perhaps it was premonition. But even had the hemp been in his hands it might have availed nothing, because the load went through without so much as a crackle of warning, his footing tilted sharply and he was flung heavily to his side, then doused as water sloshed over the broken ice cakes.

The horses grunted and scrambled for footing, but all the power they could bring to bear was as a whiff of nothing against the tug from behind and they went backward and down, snorting with fear.

From afar Baldy Brown saw the load settle and knew what it meant. His malicious motive was forgotten with the same abruptness that his feet took up the motions of running. For horses were through the ice and it needed a man to get them out! As he ran he felt the hot scorn for foreigners well up. A *man* should be with that team!

But his scornful expletives ceased and he muttered astonishment at what he saw. He could not hear the Pole's cry of fright as the ice gave and put him off his balance. But he did see the little fellow roll over, drag a leg from the grip two blocks of ice had clamped on it, stumble to his feet and pitch forward again as the settling load careened and set his footing heaving. That time he went into water! Water that smoked when the shriveling air met it! And Baldy Brown felt a shiver shoot through him as he ran, thinking not of the teamster, but of how water would feel on human flesh—at forty below!

Again the little Pole found footing and, clothing already beginning to stiffen, sought his balance. The team was down, struggling vainly to keep noses above the broken ice which floated, ready to congeal, about

them. To trip that gooseneck! Such was the only way out.

And lo, as he poised to spring for the submerged load and grasp the rope which still dangled over the topmost log, he saw the line snatched from sight and jerked below the surface as a threshing horse's leg tangled with it below. His team was fast and the trip-rope gone; his hands were already freezing in their soaked gloves.

He cried out in his native tongue and looked wildly about. A man was running toward him, but the man was two hundred yards away, in heavy clothing and making it over snow dry as salt, where feet could get no fair hold. The horses would perish before that help came.

The man shook his numbed hands free from the stiff gloves and tore open his jacket. Then, stooped over on his insecure footing, he hesitated an instant before jumping.

Breath whistled from him as his body plunged into that water, but he did not falter. With one senseless hand stuck stiffly into the crevice between two logs he thrust the other deep down and groped for that rope; he worked his legs about in the hope they might catch a loop of the line; he twisted and turned, fighting off the killing chill as the seconds sped, sobbing to himself. His head went under water and ice formed in his hair when it came above the face. He cried aloud—and the arm that had tried to keep him safe lost its hold. He sank down, close to the churning heels of the grays; then came up battling. In the crook of an elbow he clutched the trip-rope!

"Hold on, yez!" he heard a man cry and saw a figure flounder over the ice to the load. "Hold yer rope—an' I'll get yez all!"

Fingers fastened in the neck of his sweater and his body was jerked to the submerged logs with a vigor of lift that was almost superhuman. Then the exquisite torture of frost began.

Big Baldy Brown got the little chap to solid ice somehow—he never quite remembered—and dropped him there. Then he yanked lustily at the rope for which the Slav had gone into that ice water.

The horses renewed their threshing as the tugs went slack and chunks of ice slid from their hind quarters as they came close to the surface.

"Choke heem, choke heem!" a thin voice begged in his ear as Baldy reached for the grays' heads from firm footing, and he roared back—

"Choke th' off one if yez can; I'm gettin' this one!"

He tore a line free, breaking the stout leather with what seemed like a half motion, looped the strap about the animal's throat and shut down on his windpipe. He held the throttling bond there with one hand and turned on his side to help with the other, heedless even of the strain the frenzied horse put against him.

The Pole moved stiffly, as if his parts were of lead. He dragged himself close to Baldy and reached out frightened hands for the head of the free horse.

"Look out, yez—you'll fall in agin!" the woodsman growled.

Then together, the one arm of Brown working with the two all-but-useless ones of the little Pole—they brought another rein to bear about that other animal's throat. Baldy put the power of his body on the straps.

They did not know the physics of the operation. But they knew that to cut off the breathing of the animals would set their bodies floating high and that they could be easily pulled to solid ice. Slowly the animals choked down and their bodies rose to the surface.

When the other team came up with horses on a run and driver swearing his encouragement from afar Baldy was speechless from the cold and the Pole lay motionless, encased in ice. And by the time the second horse had been pulled from the hole, he had helped make, to lie breathing in sobs after the choking that had saved his life, Baldy could utter words only at the cost of an immense effort. He finally said—

"Get this—furriner to—camp—quick!"

They took them both on the same sleigh, ministering as they made the short trip. The cook, who was wise in the ways of frost, turned Baldy over to others hurriedly. When he looked at the Pole he told the camp-boss to telephone for a doctor.

And the cook was looking on late that afternoon when Baldy got out of his bunk and made his way to where the little teamster moaned.

"'S all right, Jack!" he heard the big chap say. "'S all right! Nine men out o' six 'uld 'a' quit them horses. But you didn't; an' you'll get well an' you 'n' me'll show these —— furriners what *men* is!"

FIGURES CAN'T LIE

by Arthur Somers Roche

Author of "For Bravery," "The Sport of Kings," etc.

TENNEY, star operative of the Secret Service, possessed the "camera eye" in a measure. That is to say, he never forgot a face, but unless the face was indissolubly connected with some business or social event, the operative was apt to forget the name of the owner of the face and the time and place where he had first seen it. He was not at all superhuman or uncanny, this man Tenney, nor inquisitive, save in matters of routine. Ordinarily a drunken man was of slightest interest to Tenney.

But the man who was buying champagne for several other men in a far corner of the dining-room where Tenney breakfasted, piqued the operative's curiosity, for the face was familiar—he had seen the man before. But where? To the waiter serving his coffee, Tenney indicated the purchaser of the bubbling juice of the grape.

"Who's his Merriness?" he asked. "I've always thought that this was a quiet family hotel—that's why I came here. I didn't know you held wine parties at 10 A. M."

"Lawd, Mist' Tenney, we usually don't," grinned the darkey. "But this yere gent he ain't makin' no noise, and he's spendin' his money, and—" the darkey shrugged his shoulders— "I dunno who he is, Mist' Tenney, but I know what he is—he's a fool with money, and them gents with him sure will make a hard try to part the two."

"Who are they?" demanded Tenney.

"Don't you know 'em, seh? But sho—course you don't! A patent lawyer like you-all wouldn't know nothin' about racin' people. That big man at the end of their table is Mist' "Diamond" Dave Bleakie. He makes book at Bennings, seh. So do the gents at his left and right, Mist' Bill Heenan and Mist' "Skyhigh" Alds. Them other two look like touts to me, seh.

"I guess the thirsty gentleman will play the races this aft'noon, seh. He's sure primed for a big day. He was in here las' night with the same crowd, and I never see sech a hollow gentleman in my life! He done opened two cases of wine, and when they took him upstairs to bed he was weepin' fo' mo'. And now he's been down here since eight o'clock. You gotta give him your admiration, seh. When it comes to drinkin', that gemman is sure *educated!* He registered here yest'day, seh. I can git his name from the office."

Tenney smiled.

"No thank you, Sam. I'm not interested."

Then he attacked his breakfast as if he had forgotten all about the wine-bibber in the corner. Yet on his way out of the hotel he stopped at the desk and glanced carelessly at the register. Among the arrivals of the previous night he saw, in sprawling chirography, the name of Peter Firkins, of Washington. Tenney pointed at the name.

"Our champagne friend?" he asked the clerk.

The latter nodded.

"Don't know how he happened to pick a quiet place like this for his party, sir," apologized the clerk. "But he's been quiet enough, for all his drinking and his friends. However—if you object, sir, I'll speak to the proprietor."

"Certainly not," said Tenney. "Judging from his friends he'll be relieved of his money soon, and the hotel of his company."

Then, brows wrinkled, Tenney left the hotel, for while he did not pride himself particularly on his memory, he nevertheless knew that when he recognized a face he should also recognize the owner's name if he saw or heard it. He was certain that he knew the face of the wine-bibber. Yet in all his wide acquaintance, he had never met a man named Peter Firkins. It was strange; Tenney might see a man and not know his name, yet if the name were mentioned Tenney would always know where to place it. Likewise, if a name were mentioned, and a little later Tenney should see its owner, even the lapse of many years would not cause him hesitation in applying the name to the man.

"I must be getting old," he told himself. "Failing memory is the first sign, I'm told. Well——"

He shrugged his shoulders and hailed a cab. In the presence of the important message from Dilkes, Chief of the Secret Service, which had come to him just before breakfast, Tenney could ill afford to fret his brain over trivialities. He had dismissed the petty matter from his mind when he entered the office of his Chief.

"Well, Chief," he said, "you sent word that —— had broken loose, so as soon as I finished breakfast, I ——"

He paused, his eyes suddenly alighting upon a third figure in the room, a small man, whose lack of stature was emphasized by the manner in which he huddled—that's the word—in a huge leather-cushioned armchair. The face and figure Tenney recognized at once, and he raised his eyebrows inquiringly as he looked at Dilkes; he became suddenly conscious that the room radiated nervous strain. The man in the chair lifted burning eyes and looked at Tenney.

"This the man, Chief Dilkes?"

"This is he," replied the Chief. "Tenney, this is the Secretary of War. He's come to me, and I've sent for you because——"

The Secretary interrupted.

"Why did you not come at once, sir? Is breakfast more important than the patriotism——"

Tenney flushed.

"It's rather essential, sir, that I come prepared. I'm not a health faddist. I need breakfast before I do anything. And I rather judged from the Chief's message that I'd have to do some thinking."

"Thinking?" cried Dilkes. "Acting, Tenney! Acting at once! Before the last secret of the War Department is given away; before the ——"

"Before the United States is laid bare to attack which it can not resist," cried the Secretary. "Before treachery, black treason, has sold away the secrets of our national defenses! I dare not even think, for even my thoughts are read, written down and sent to the agents of Japan!"

The Secretary placed his hands before his eyes, and a shudder ran the length of his body.

"No one could hear—no one could see—there was no signaling—no——"

Tenney's muscles stiffened; the lines about the mouth hardened, and the nostrils of the strong, pugnacious nose seemed slightly to flare.

"Look here, Mr. Secretary," he said, "you mustn't give way. Worry gets you nothing. Tell me—what's up?"

"The plans of the coast defenses of the United States are being sold to Japan," said the Secretary.

Tenney whistled.

"And the seller is ——"

"God alone knows!" ejaculated the Secretary.

"Oh, no," said Tenney. "The seller knows, the buyer knows, and—maybe we'll know by and by. Try and tell me just what has happened, will you, please?"

There was an easy friendliness in Tenney's manner, an absence of flunkyism in the presence of the cabinet official, that spoke of conscious equality with any one and every one. It spoke of more than that—it spoke of the sane viewpoint that refuses to recognize the supernatural in the purely physical. It spoke of confidence unmeasured, which is different from conceit.

Dilkes used to say that Tenney hypnotized people. Tenney denied the charge. "I make 'em come down to earth; that's all," he used to say.

And in the present instance the Secretary came down to earth. The bulk of Tenney, the easy voice and colloquial speech were as a cool spring in which the cabinet officer bathed a burning brain. His eyes seemed to cool and his upper lip ceased twitching.

"YOU'LL excuse my losing control of myself," he said, slightly apologetic, "when I tell you what's happened and the—the impossibility of its happening. Last night, in the Washington Post-office, a mail-sorter was going over the mail. In some way he tore an envelope open. He told me that, while unusual, such accidents happen once in a while. Well, the contents of the envelope fell out upon the floor. The sorter picked them up to replace them in the envelope. But his eye happened to be struck by a typewritten line across the top of the first page of the contents. And he saw the words, 'Copy of plans for southwestern mobilization.'

"Mr. Tenney, God was kind to the United States in seeing that a man of intelligence was sorting that particular bunch of mail. This mail-sorter is an ambitious man; three months ago he took the civil service examinations for a clerkship in my department. He passed, and had already received notification that he would enter upon a clerkship next week.

"The average mail-sorter would have replaced the plans in the envelope, written on the latter 'Opened by mistake,' and Japan would have received the plans, as undoubtedly she has been receiving others during the past few weeks.

"But this mail-sorter had sense. He looked at the address. He saw that the plans were addressed to one Itchi Marcy, a fruit merchant in this city. He wondered that a Japanese should be receiving copies of our military plans. He wondered and—late last night he brought the plans to me.

"Mr. Tenney, I was dumbfounded in consternation. Listen! The copies which the sorter brought to me were exact! Every detail of our planned mobilization of the troops in the southwest in the event of troubles with Mexico were outlined there. Yet, Mr. Tenney, the originals of those plans were not completed until five o'clock yesterday afternoon.

"I myself worked over the first draft, and when the final draft was completed I made changes, in my own handwriting, in it. I made those last changes at five o'clock. I happen to know, for I heard a clock striking at that moment. Now, then, in the room with me at the time—my private office in the War Department—were just two men: the First Assistant Secretary of War, and my stenographer.

"From two o'clock, when we commenced work on the plans, until six, when I locked the plans in my safe and left the office, no one entered the office, no one left it; no one even knocked upon the door. We three were absolutely alone.

"After the plans were completed at five o'clock I attended to other business, and it was six, by my own watch, when the three of us finally left the office. Yet, Mr. Tenney, those plans were mailed *to Itchi Marcy shortly after five o'clock!*"

"What's that?" cried Tenney.

The Secretary smiled wanly.

"I thought as you thought—impossible," he said wearily. "But look at this envelope."

He passed Tenney the envelope addressed to the Japanese fruit merchant. The operative looked at the cancellation mark across the stamps. Clearly he saw the time printed thereon, 5:30 P. M. of the previous day. The Secretary sighed.

"It was midnight," he resumed, "when the mail-sorter brought me this envelope. My first thought was to have my stenographer arrested. I would have done so but that I noticed the time of the cancelation. Then I was glad that I had not shamed an innocent man. For, Mr. Tenney, letters are not canceled until some time after they are dropped into letter-boxes—until they reach the post-office. Even if the letter was brought directly to the post-office, it reached there half an hour before I—and the two others—left the office. So it was impossible that my stenographer—the First Assistant is beyond suspicion—could have mailed the envelope.

"Mr. Tenney, remember that those plans were exact copies of the ones in my safe. Remember that no one left, entered, or even knocked at the door between two and six. The windows of my office communicate with no other building; signaling was out of the question. Nor was a dictagraph employed to steal my dictation.

"In my desperation I went to the department last night at shortly after midnight—I examined the walls—no wires! Mr. Tenney, it is physically impossible that those plans left my office before six. Or afterwards—for they are still in my safe.

"And yet, some time between five and five-thirty, a copy of plans—exact in every detail—was mailed to a Japanese, who is undoubtedly an agent of his native land. Mr. Tenney, some one read my thoughts, and—how long has it been continuing? During the past weeks I've drawn up plans for mobilization of troops on the Atlantic Coast—on the Pacific. I've even drawn up plans of our coast fortifications.

"And if this relatively unimportant matter of mobilizing troops in the event of trouble with Mexico is conveyed to Japan, how am I to know that other matters—Hawaii, San Francisco, the Philippines—are not in her hands? I dare not think, I dare not plan—I'm not a fool, Mr. Tenney. And yet no one left my office, no one entered——"

"What's your stenographer's name?" demanded Tenney bruskly.

"James Colwell."

"His salary?"

"Thirty dollars a week. But, Mr. Tenney, why bother about him?"

"Did he make carbon copies of the plans?"

"Yes—two. But I have those in the safe, and——"

"Where did he come from?"

"He's a civil service employee, Mr. Tenney: I chose him because of his rapidity and general usefulness. But why bother about him? Haven't I made it clear that he could not have mailed the plans?"

"You've made it clear that some one mailed them," snapped Tenney. "And you don't really believe, in your heart of hearts, that any one has been reading your thoughts, do you?"

The Secretary smiled sheepishly.

"N-no, but—figures can't lie, Mr. Tenney. It was six when we left the office. It was before half-past five when the plans were mailed. And figures can't lie, Mr. Tenney; figures can't lie!"

"True enough," said Tenney, "but men can, can't they?"

The Secretary stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure that I know myself what I mean," said Tenney. "But—you've told me everything. And Dilkes is the only man you've told besides me?"

The Secretary nodded.

"Good," said Tenney. "Now, then—you keep quiet about this matter. There's nothing gained by announcing it."

"Are you going to arrest the Jap—Marcy?" asked Dilkes.

"What's the use, now?" asked Tenney. "He'd not give up anything. And it would only warn whoever is selling the secrets."

"But what *are* you going to do?" cried the harassed Secretary.

Tenney grinned.

"Me? I'm going to put these plans in a fresh envelope and address them to Itchi Marcy."

The Secretary gasped.

"Give him the plans that we've saved?"

"And if we don't?" said Tenney smoothly. "Isn't their failure to arrive going to alarm him—and the man who supplies him? And whom do we want?"

"Wh-why—the man who sells the plans," stammered the Secretary.

"Right," said Tenney.

He started for the door. The Secretary half rose.

"You think you—can discover him?"

Tenney laughed.

"I know where he is right now."

The Secretary stared.

"Then arrest him! Arrest him! Let's get a file of marines, and——"

But Tenney shook his head.

"I said I know where he is; that isn't saying I can prove anything. You'll hear from me within twenty-four hours."

He nodded bruskly and was gone. The Secretary stared at the Chief of the Secret Service.

"Are you sure the man is capable?" he asked. "Remember how important the matter is; and he treats it carelessly. He says he knows; he—figures can't lie, Dilkes; figures can't lie!"

"But Tenney said that men can," replied the Chief.

"And what did he mean?"

Dilkes stared at the Secretary.

"Lord, Mr. Secretary, *I* never know what he means. But he said it, and I've noticed he never says anything without a reason."

But the desperate cabinet officer could only pass his hand across his brow as if to wipe away the agony for which the

departure of Tenney and his confident manner had made room.

BUT Tenney did not mail the plans to Itchi Marcy. Tenney was not above changing his mind. In a corner of a quiet café to which he repaired after leaving the Chief's office, Tenney thought.

Tenney was neither a faker nor a bluffer. His confidence when he left the Secretary had not been assumed. He had his own reasons for confidence.

"It's half the battle," he used to say. "If I'm dead sure that I'm going to get what I'm after, I don't have time to think about the possibility of losing out, and if I don't think about losing, well—I don't lose."

But now, as he mused over a bottle of lithia water, some of Tenney's past success-born confidence oozed away from him. The hopeful scientist, on the seeming verge of a great discovery, is brought to recognition of failure by the contemplation of the figures of his last test—for he knows the figures do not lie. Matter-of-fact, almost phlegmatic, was Tenney; that disembodied spirits had copied the plans, Tenney did not believe. And yet—figures could not lie, as the Secretary had hopelessly declared.

Didn't the Japanese boast of a culture, an education, a religion, that went back to those ages before Christianity dawned? Didn't intelligent men claim that the ancient civilizations of Asia were close to the scheme of the Universe and the Powers that planned the scheme? For one fraction of a second Tenney felt his flesh crawl.

Then he drained his glass, rose to his feet and took his heavy way out of the café. This was the twentieth century; for every physical effect, there was a physical reason. Such was Tenney's philosophy, and by it he would abide. What he had told the Secretary was true; he knew where the man was who had sold the secrets; he *must* know, or else black magic existed in these sane days. But *who* the man was was different from *where* he was. The where was easy; the who—Tenney's lips hardened as he struck away from the café.

He examined the typewritten address on the envelope addressed to the Japanese fruiterer. Of course each typewriter had its own distinct identity. But to trace the identity—it wasn't even worth while to examine the machines in the War Department. The man clever enough to effect this treason was not fool enough to use a machine that might be traced. He had probably gone to any one of a hundred places where he might use a machine for a few minutes. It would mean weeks of laborious search to trace the machine. Tenney shook his head; he wouldn't do it. Whoever the traitor was, he was nothing short of a genius in his cunning. Genius—that was it.

"Yet genius," said Tenney to himself, "is merely the art of taking pains. This fellow took infinite pains to prove that an apparent impossibility had been effected. Why? So that in the event of discovery he would never be suspected."

He stopped short in his walk and scratched his head. Suddenly he laughed to himself.

"If I try *thinking* this out," he told himself, "I'll go as bug as the Secretary is getting. Nix! I'll do something!"

He strode toward the post-office. Carelessly, he had neglected to take the name of the mail-sorter. He would not go back and ask the Secretary for it, for the post-office was close at hand; he could find the name there. And so he did; his gold badge gave him access to the list of employees and their hours of duty. It was not Tenney's method to ask directly for information when indirection accomplished the same thing. Direction crystallized suspicion; there was no reason why the postal people should know of his wish to see the sorter. So why let them know? Why give them opportunity to talk?

Tenney took the list and ran over it; he found the name of Michael Clarke, sorter, hours from 4 P. M. to midnight. He must be the man who had notified the Secretary of the treason. Tenney started to fold up the list, his eye running idly down the columns of names as he did so. As though printed in letters of flame, he saw the name, Henry Davis. The camera eye begets the photographic brain. He knew the name, and the face that the name belonged to stood before his mental eyes. Yet Tenney did not start, gave no sign of emotion. He merely folded the paper neatly and handed it to the chief clerk who had procured it for him with a languid thanks.

"Hope there's no scandal in our department," said the clerk anxiously.

"If there were I'd be liable to tell you, wouldn't I?" grinned Tenney.

And then he left the building, his entire plan of action changed. He had intended to visit the sorter, in order to go over carefully the latter's tale of the discovery. He had intended to mail the plans to Marcy that suspicion might not be aroused. Better to let the Japs get one more secret than so to alarm the plotters that they might further conceal their identities and methods. But now——

"It's a hunch," said Tenney, "it's a hunch! But so's most of this game."

For Tenney was frank, even with himself. He knew that common sense, application and luck were the chief elements of the criminologist's success. The first two he had always; the third he seized upon whensoever he might.

THE landlady of the modest boarding house was most loquacious.

"Far be it from a widow woman with her living to make to gossip about her guests, Mr. Davis," she said, "but, honest, I'm glad you're here. Your brother is always reg'lar with his rent money, Mr. Davis, and I dunno's I have any call to say anything at all about him; but me taking a sort of interest in all my guests, and you being his own brother seems like my conscience compels me to tell you that your brother is carrying on awful, Mr. Davis."

"Boys will be boys, Mrs. Paxton," grinned the pseudo Davis.

"I know that, Mr. Davis, and your brother is a nice-mannered boy, too. But he ain't been to home at all last night. And last week he was out three whole nights and the week before that four times, and—I don't want you should repeat all this. But when your brother came here a year ago he was as nice a young man as I'd want to meet.

"But lately—he's got in bad company, Mr. Davis. I knew it; for in his room I've found racin' papers, and pieces of cardboard that I know are bettin' tickets. My poor dead husband had that bad habit—playin' the races, Mr. Davis, and I know the bettin' tickets when I see 'em. It led my husband to drink and then—I'm a widow woman, now, Mr. Davis, and I feel it's my Christian duty to tell you about your young brother so's you can snatch him from the burnin', Mr. Davis. And if you're offended and get him to move—well, I've done my duty, Mr. Davis."

"I'm not offended," was her visitor's answer. "I appreciate your kindness. I shall certainly lecture my brother."

"You certainly ought to, sir," said the landlady. "Him bettin' two hundred at a clip—I dunno how he does it on his salary. He's headed for ruin, sir, if you'll excuse a Christian woman for sayin' what it's her bounden duty *to* say."

"Thank you, Mrs. Paxton," was the grave answer. "I'll see Henry today. Good afternoon. I'm only sorry that he wasn't at home. But you tell him of my call if he comes home before I get back. Have him stay in."

"I will, sir," promised the landlady.

Whereupon Tenney, making mental note to send the landlady a twenty-dollar bill for the information which she had given to the alleged brother of the young mail clerk, Henry Davis, departed from the house of the valuable and good-hearted Mrs. Paxton. Around the corner he found a drug store wherein was a Washington directory. He turned to the C's. Shortly he was in possession of the information that James Colwell, clerk in the War Department, lived at an address near Dupont Circle. Tenney's eyebrows were raised. He smiled and bent his steps in the direction of the stenographer's address. It was a private hotel, one of the best. Colwell's entire weekly salary would hardly pay the stenographer's rent, much less clothe and feed him.

"It's a wonder," said Tenney to himself, "that the main guys don't look after their employees more. Trust a man with important, priceless secrets, and never investigate to see what's his manner of living!"

He grunted disgust at the fatuousness that trusted without investigation, and left the neighborhood. Half an hour later he entered the fruit store of Itchi Marcy. There happened to be no customers in the store at the moment, and a white clerk was engaged in piling fruit in attractive pyramids. Tenney walked past him and addressed himself to a bright-eyed Japanese who sat at a desk. From an inner pocket the Secret Service man pulled the bundle of plans, in a plain envelope. He laid them on Marcy's desk.

"I suppose you were alarmed because they hadn't come, eh?"

The Jap looked up suspiciously; he opened the envelope and glanced at the contents.

"Why were they sent this way?" he asked.

"Getting a little leery of the mail," was Tenney's answer. "It looked safer this way."

"Who are you?" demanded Marcy.

"Oh, I'm just a friend," smiled Tenney. "I'm getting mine, which reminds me, he—you know who I mean—says he needs a bunch of coin today. Anything doing?"

The Jap looked again at the envelope's contents. If he had any suspicion it vanished at a closer examination of the papers. He unlocked his safe, placing the papers therein and at the same time extracting from a drawer some bills of a denomination quite large to be in the possession of a retail fruiterer. He handed the money to Tenney. The latter shook his head. He achieved a sullenly sheepish look.

"Put it in an envelope," he said, "and seal it. He—he don't trust me a whole lot, —— him, and he'll swear I copped some for myself if it ain't in an envelope."

Again the Jap looked curiously at Tenney. But he made no demur. He placed the bills in an envelope, sealed it, and handed it to Tenney. The latter shook his head.

"Address it," he demanded.

The Jap's eyes gleamed; his hand shot forth and pulled open Tenney's coat; the useful little gold badge with the insignia of the Secret Service was revealed. Marcy's other hand shot to a drawer in his desk, but Tenney had recovered from his first surprise; his fingers closed around the wrist of Marcy. There was a wrench, a straining heave, and the Jap was hurled from his chair and lay twitching upon the floor. Before the white clerk had gathered his startled wits, Tenney was at the door, whistling peculiarly. A blue uniform came around the corner and its wearer saw the upraised finger of Tenney and came down the street on the run. The operative turned to the alarmed clerk.

"Nothin's goin' to happen to you, son; this isn't a hold-up. Your boss is going on a little visit with this gentleman." And he indicated the policeman. To the latter he showed his badge. "Lock that Jap up," he said. "Tell the Captain that no one is to see him, not if it's the Jap Ambassador. Tell him it's the Secret Service. Got me?"

The policeman, dazed but understanding, nodded. He bent over the form of Marcy.

"A little water, that's all," said Tenney. "He was going to use a gun on me, but I beat him at his own game; I knew a little jiu-jitsu. Ring up the patrol, lock up this store, and put him in a cell. I'll be around tonight to make a charge. And mind you. No lawyers—nobody—to see him."

Again the officer nodded assent. Tenney walked to the safe and calmly abstracted the plans which had just been sold to the Japanese. Then he left the fruit store, a smile of chagrin wreathing his lips.

"I fell down there," he said "but that doesn't prove that I'm not right. Marcy was too clever, but—I don't believe the other fellow is."

He hailed a passing taxi and directed that he be driven to the Bennings race-track. Half an hour later, in the betting-ring, he found the man for whom he was looking, Mr. Peter Firkins, the wine-bibber of the morning. Firkins was under the influence of liquor, but not completely so, by any manner of means. As the negro waiter had said, Firkins must have been hollow; or else much practise enabled him to carry much liquor. The man was just drunk enough to be ugly.

He was standing before a betting-stool, angrily tearing up tickets on the last race when Tenney sighted him. There was on his face the scowl of the bad loser. By his side was one of the touts of the morning, apparently pleading with Firkins to follow his judgment in the next race. But Firkins had evdiently been losing on the first three races—it was mid-afternoon now, and half the day's card had been run off.

For he waved the tout away from him, refusing to be cajoled. The tout slunk sulkily away and Tenney approached the buyer of champagne. He touched him on the shoulder and Firkins turned.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded angrily.

"The apple-cart's upset," said Tenney with an air of caution. "I was told to tip you off."

The drunken man stared; slowly the cryptic meaning of Tenney's words penetrated his intelligence.

"You mean that Marcy——"

The strong fingers of Tenney gripped the man's wrist.

"Well, Mr. Henry Davis, otherwise Peter Firkins, I guess that's enough. Come along with me!"

AT EIGHT o'clock that same night Tenney entered the private office of the Secretary of War. Already in the room were the Secretary, Dilkes, Stenographer Colwell, and First-Assistant Secretary Jamieson. The eager Secretary did not bother to make introductions; he did not wait until Tenney was fairly within the room.

"Have you got him? Have you got him? You 'phoned that——"

"I know where he is," said Tenney. "But before I tell his name, before an arrest is made, maybe you'd like to be as certain as I am."

"Of course, of course," cried the Secretary. "Tell us—tell us how you——"

Tenney sank into a chair. As he did so he squirmed and reached behind him; he pulled forth a revolver and laid it on his knees.

"Excuse me," he said, "but sitting on knobby steel ain't pleasant." He looked about him at his auditors, a hard light in his eyes.

"Never go anywhere without this little gun," he said. "I can sure use it, too."

Then he leaned comfortably back in his chair, playing, with apparent idleness, with his weapon. Dilkes, unseen by the others, loosened his own revolver in the patent holster in his waistcoat. Dilkes, of them all, was the only one who knew that Tenney never played with deadly weapons. Dilkes wanted to be ready.

"This morning," said Tenney, "I saw a man buying wine. Nothing strange about that durin' the racin' season, only—I knew the man's face and didn't know his name. And when I saw his name on a hotel register the name didn't fit the face. Something queer about that, gentlemen.

"I'm not infallible—not by a long shot, but give me face and give me name and I'll remember the time and place where I met the man if it was thirty years ago. But I'd never met a man named Peter Firkins, which was the name of my wine-buying friend. Funny thing, for I knew his face.

"I forgot the little puzzle a while later, though, for you, Mr. Secretary, gave me something else to think about. But the puzzle came back to me a while later, for I happened to be in the post-office and there I saw a name that fitted the face of the wine party. And name and face brought back time and event; I'd seen my wine-buying friend two years ago, in the post-office, during an investigation. I'd learned his name, then.

"Well, gentlemen, I was on another case, and the fact that a postal clerk was using another name didn't interest me just then. At least, it wouldn't have interested me if it hadn't happened that this clerk's hours were from two until ten, and if it hadn't also happened that between these hours he canceled all the mail that came from a certain city district.

"Yes, gentlemen, this clerk Davis, that I'd seen masquerading as Firkins, took in all the letters that certain carriers brought to the post-office between two and ten. And among those certain carriers were the carriers who collected mail from the War Department or the near vicinity. Yes, his hours and duties were all printed on the paper the post-office people showed me.

"And gentlemen, that made me mighty interested in Davis-Firkins. For some one was stealing War-Department secrets and selling them to the Japs. And, gentlemen, it was impossible for any one but the Secretary, his Assistant, or his stenographer, to steal these secrets."

His fingers closed about his gun and his stern eyes swept the room.

"Don't any one move, please, until I've finished," he snapped. Then he resumed. "It also seemed impossible for any of these three to be the guilty party. But, gentlemen, it *was* impossible for an outsider to steal the secrets; it only *seemed* impossible for the Secretary, his Assistant, or his stenographer, to steal them.

"The stolen plans were mailed, gentlemen! They were mailed—so that no person could be traced—to an agent of Japan. It seemed impossible that any of the three persons I've named could have mailed those plans, because the envelope containing them was postmarked at 5:30 P. M., and none left the office until six. And figures can't lie. But I saw the way in which the man who made the figures could lie!

"I saw the way, and I had seen the man who had it in his power to save the traitor from suspicion in the event of discovery of the theft of the plans; I had seen that

postal clerk buying champagne in the company of racing men—men who were with him to bleed him.

"Gentlemen, I looked up the postal clerk. I found that he was poor not so very long ago; that he had no money outside his salary; that no inheritance had been left him. I then looked up one of the three men who knew of the plans, because he had helped draw them up. Then I arrested the agent of Japan. Then I arrested Davis-Firkins, and he gave himself away. Some one," he drawled, "might as well do a little confessing; it's good for the soul."

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then the Secretary spoke.

"Did the Jap speak? Did the postal clerk confess?"

Tenney shook his head.

"Neither of them; haven't bothered to question them. I know without them. The plans were mailed to Marcy last night —*after* six! The man who mailed them dreaded discovery; he feared to deliver the plans in person, or through an agent lest he be traced. So he mailed them. But even then there might be discovery, as indeed there was. And he was cautious—oh, cautious as the devil makes his own who betray their native land! So he bribed a postal clerk; bribed him to stamp letters with a cancelation mark timed earlier than the letters were mailed. It was clever—too clever!

"If the traitor had made it seem possible that an outsider had stolen the plans he might not have been suspected. But the traitor had to come to this building to get the plans; he wanted his after-hours visit to seem innocent. And so it would have seemed, with the envelope canceled hours before that night visit, if it had not been that the tool he used was weak; if it had not been that Davis could not stand prosperity and that I—that I'm lucky.

"As it is—Colwell, you might as well own up. Why, I even know that you own a portable typewriter which you brought in here, lest the print of the office machine be recognized."

The stenographer leaped to his feet.

"I? Own up? For God's sake, Mr. Detective, you don't accuse me of—of betraying my country?"

"You live in one of the most expensive private hotels in the city," snapped Tenney, "and your salary is thirty dollars a week. Care to own up? It may make things easier for you!"

Colwell turned to the Secretary.

"Mr. Secretary, you won't listen to this man's jumble of falsehoods! I—why, I don't know what he's talking about. As for my money—my living at the Allerton, why—you yourself know that my family is wealthy; that I only entered the Department because I chose it for my career. You—don't believe him—don't—with his absurd deductions, his drunken men, his postal clerks, his——"

Tenney rose and walked to the door.

"You don't have to believe me, Mr. Secretary; the night-watchman who let him into the building at eight o'clock last night is outside."

He flung the door open.

"Cavanaugh," he said to the man standing outside, "come in. Point out the man you admitted into the building last night. You told me that you let a man in here, and that he carried a bundle about the size of a portable typewriter. You said you thought nothing of it because he'd done it several times before, saying he had work to make up. I didn't ask you his name because I knew it. Point him out, Cavanaugh!"

The watchman rubbed his hands nervously together.

"Why, you ain't forgotten me letting you in last night, have you, Mr. Jamieson?"

There was torturing silence for a moment. Then Tenney gently pushed the watchman out and closed the door. He stared down at the First-Assistant Secretary of War, the "man above suspicion," who had sunk into a chair, his face hidden in his hands.

"Jamieson, Jamieson!" gasped the Secretary. "Not you, not you! My own Assistant, appointed by the President himself! Not you, whose grandfather was at Chapultepec, whose father was at Gettysburg, whose brother died in Cuba! Not you—not you—Jamieson! Not you!"

There came no answer from the stricken traitor. The Secretary's horrified grief turned to anger. He strode to the limp figure in the chair and shook him. No answer; he bent over him, pulling the shielding hands from the face. A moment he stared; then he arose, shocked sadness in his eyes. He straightened the hands of the man whom discovery had slain.

"It's better this way, far better," he said. "The name of Jamieson stands high in the nation's scroll of heroes. Let us forget."

"I'M willing to hand it to you, Tenney," said Dilkes, next morning. "You certainly tackled a hard proposition, and not even your luck can take away your credit. But, old man, when you told us you knew the traitor, weren't you—er—patting yourself a bit on the back? Weren't you—er—bragging when you said, before you began work on the case, that you knew the identity of the traitor?"

Tenney grinned.

"You ain't got the memory I have, Chief, or else you'd know that I didn't say that I knew *who* the traitor was; I said I knew *where* he was! I knew he was in the War Department all the time. Come again, Chief, you ain't caught me yet!"

"I wonder if any one ever will," said Dilkes thoughtfully.

THE SALTERS

A Complete Novelette

by George Brydges Rodney

Author of "The Leaven," "The Taking of Peter Pan," etc.

THE HEAVY roar of a gun-shot broke the afternoon hush, sending a bevy of mesa quail scurrying up the rocky hillside. It swung to and fro along the walls of the cañon, finally rolling out upon the flat at the mouth of the cañon in a very volume of sound.

John Wilkes, ex-deputy sheriff, cowpuncher, prospector on occasion, came to the door of his store and stared up the valley from under the shade of his hand.

"Now I wonder what in the world them fools wants to go about the land shootin' their guns off fer an' skeerin' out of the county what little game there's been left in it. Dailey ought to know better even if Boaz don't. They ain't either of 'em got brains enough to freight a louse with."

He stood for a moment staring up the cañon, his gray beard moving slowly up and down like a goat's, as he thoughtfully masticated his tobacco, and then, passing inside the building, he devoted himself to a methodical re-arrangement on the shelves of what little stock his store boasted.

It was not an alluring place, Precisa. Why it should have been so named perhaps but Heaven knew. There was indeed no special reason why it should ever have been settled at all. Mr. Wilkes, who had wandered foot-loose over Arizona for more than thirty-five years, had his own theories on the reasons for the original settlement of Arizona.

"It ain't no example of a country where a virtuous an' hard-workin' people settled to git 'Freedom to worship God,' like I read of in a book once. An' they didn't come out here beca'se they coveted a piece of God's footstool to raise their children an' perpetuate their virtues that makes the

safeguard of a state. I heard a feller say that once at a Fourth o' July meetin'— No, sir, it ain't none o' them! That ain't the way Arizona come to be settled. She got settled. The reason you find so many hell-holes with people in 'em down here in the Southwest is because people was movin' through here to git to a better place an' their cattle died. They couldn't git away and they *had* to stay."

In which remark there was much truth.

He was disturbed at his quasi-quiet task of re-arranging his stock by the entrance of two men who stamped their way into the cool interior of the adobe building, demanding beer. Mr. Wilkes produced three bottles—warm, opened them by the simple process of knocking off the necks against his spurred heel and set them on the counter. Silence reigned while the three men gulped down the warm beer.

"This is shore a pleasant place," ejaculated Dailey staring out into the hot sunshine where the heat-horizon of the desert fairly winked at him.

"Well—" Mr. Wilkes spat judicially at a tarantula that was striving vainly to carry off the body of a dead desert rat—"I like it."

"You—like—it?" Boaz stared at him.

"Yep. I like it. Oh, I don't mean I'm plumb foolish about it, but I do like it after a fashion. That is, I like it about as much as a man would like bein' scalped."

Boaz snorted like a horse.

"You're a —— fool, John," he said amiably.

"Sure I am," agreed Mr. Wilkes. "What else would I be here fer? Tell me that?"

Boaz did not answer, but stood looking out across the plain that wrapped Preciosa as in a blanket.

PRECIOSA stands out upon the brown desert exactly as a cake of chocolate stands out upon a mahogany table. There is nothing there, if one excepts the public corral built of long-discarded railroad cross-ties stood on end and interlaced with branches of long-dead mesquit, the one well from which alkali water is pumped by a lame white horse that, blindfolded, tramps his weary round pumping up the water which Mr. Wilkes sells for ten cents a bucketful, John Wilkes's store and hotel, and three other houses near the little railroad station.

The one thing that gives the place any importance in the scheme of things is the fact that Preciosa is the railroad station for Fort Stevens, distant twenty miles due north, and Fort Stevens, during these days when the Mexican Border was being as closely guarded as the convents were guarded during the Thirty Years' War, was an important point, being the station of the 16th Regiment of Cavalry, to which force, for its sins, was assigned the pleasant duty of policing and patroling the adjacent section of the Mexican-American International Line.

The population of Preciosa has never exceeded thirty people. The three white men who were as regular in their attendance at Mr. Wilkes' saloon as the minute-hand upon a watch, were Wilkes himself, Peter Dailey and Tom Boaz. The last-named men were partners in a great if unremunerative cattle ranch a few miles to the west of Preciosa. On this particular occasion they had met as usual to discuss grievances.

"I been talkin' to Boaz this mornin', John," said Mr. Dailey. "Do you know that old Colonel Borden that's been in command at Fort Stevens fer the past two years?"

"As well as I know my own dog," said Mr. Wilkes. "Only I ain't got no dog."

"He's sure gettin' some afflictin' with his 'My man, this' an' 'My man, that' whenever he sees me. My name's Dailey, an' he knows it, an' some day I'm goin' to fix him so's he'll remember it——"

He lapsed into silence, eyed by the observant Mr. Wilkes, who was morally certain there was something in the wind.

"Say, John," he said presently, "are you aimin' to sell that claim of yourn up the cañon? The one by Willow Water, I mean?"

"I been aimin' to sell it fer some time," replied the cautious Mr. Wilkes, "but I took a rotten bad aim. The man got away."

"Who was he, John?"

"I don't know rightly. He told me he was the Dead Agent fer the district."

"The—the what?"

"The Dead Agent."

"What in ——'s a Dead Agent, John?"

"That's what I asked *him*. He told me that the Dead Agent was the man who has the contract to supply able-bodied voters fer every Democrat who's died in the

District since the last election. That's why he left before I got the chance to unload that claim on him."

"What do you want fer it?"

"It ain't fer sale," declared the astute Mr. Wilkes. "Not now. Not till I know somethin' more about it."

"Why not? You ain't got nothin' up there——"

"Oh, yes, I have, too. I got an eighty-foot tunnel all timbered up——"

"You never got no color there, did you?"

MR. WILKES started to shake his head, then stopped so suddenly that his hat fell off. He replaced it, thinking rapidly. He remembered the gunshot up the valley and he knew that both Boaz and Dailey were too lazy to wander so far from home afoot after the small game of the cañon. They might have been blasting on his old claim. He had spent his last dollar on it the year before and had never got enough gold out of the entire eighty feet of tunnel "to fill a tooth with," as he expressed it.

Disheartenment, however, was far from him. He well knew the truth of the miner's maxim that "Gold is where you find it." Perhaps Boaz and Dailey had something up their sleeves and would let him in on it. Certainly he would gain nothing by hurrying them. He would let them take their time.

"What do you fellers mean?" he asked slowly. "What's the game?"

"Oh, nothin'. We just thought we'd offer you some spot cash fer that old claim."

"What do you want it fer?"

"It's a good hole, an' it's a deep hole," said Dailey reflectively; "an' me an' Boaz thought maybe we might make a grubstake by cuttin' it up into post-holes an' shippin' it north where the squatters is takin' up land——"

He successfully dodged the empty bottle that Mr. Wilkes threw at him and returned to the charge.

"On the level, John, me an' Boaz is gettin' darned tired of bein' always called 'My man' by that ol'—ol'—" he hesitated for a name—"ol' Lord Cornwallis—*he's* dead an' can't kick—up at Fort Stevens. We're aimin' to get a few dollars out o' this an' get the ol' Colonel to move back to England again. Are you on?"

Mr. Wilkes yelped joyfully. He too had had more than his share of the Colonel's superiority.

"What'll you take to let us work it, John?"

"One-third share in whatever's goin', you to pay all expenses," said Mr. Wilkes cautiously. He had been stung before by his two friends and would take no chances.

"Done. Put it down on paper."

Mr. Wilkes, drawing forth a scrap of wrapping-paper and the stump of a pencil, carefully set to work on the contract, interlarding his scholastic efforts with audible sucks at his pencil.

"We had hard luck last month, John. We lost a bunch of pretty good Hereford cattle. We was aimin' to ship 'em East, but some greaser across the Line wished for 'em before we got a chance to ship. We had 'em in the big pasture an' they got across the Line an' cut the fence. One of our greaser herders went at the same time. We had to lick him once before fer carryin' a runnin' iron under his saddle an' brandin' maverick calves——"

"I never could see what you two was doin' in puttin' a wire fence around a pasture so close to the Line. You might have knowed that that fence was like a advertisement to them greasers, sayin' 'I got a good thing here. Come an' get it.' What you wanted to fence in two thousand acres of bare desert for, gets me. It's like puttin' a fence around a graveyard. Them that's in can't git out, an' them that's out don't want to git in—fer no good purpose, that is——"

"That's so, John," said Boaz softly. "But we may break even, after all. We've got four witnesses to the fact that the fence was cut, an' two of 'em'll swear that the men that done the cuttin' was Mexican soldiers. We've got all kinds of affidavits to that——"

"Object bein'—?" queried Mr. Wilkes.

"If one regiment of cavalry spends twelve thousand dollars of pay in a month in a place, somebody's makin' money," reflected Mr. Dailey. "There'll be beef contracts an' oat an' hay contracts, an' if any more troops should be sent here to help us poor citizens tryin' to wrest a livin' from a fruitless soil——"

"I get you," said Mr. Wilkes joyfully.

"An' we sent our affidavits to our Representative in Congress assembled, an', John, if you'd only hear Colonel Borden, up at the Post, about his havin' to split up his

regiment to guard the border, you'd think hell had sure broke loose at last."

"Where does he come in at?"

"He got orders to send detachments out all along the Line to watch the water-holes to pertect the lives an' property of——"

"You an' Boaz? There ain't no work in guardin' your property. You're settin' down in 'em all the time——"

"So, seein' that Colonel Borden's got a pile o' cash an' a most unlovely disposition, me an' Boaz has decided that he ain't a desirable citizen. We're goin' to move him East, John. He thinks he's a fine prospector an' knows all about minerals. I'll bet he never saw nothin' like this. Look!"

He tossed a bit of shining quartz upon the counter, under the nose of the astonished Mr. Wilkes.

Mr. Wilkes examined it carefully.

"That never come from my claim," he said presently, having subjected the sample to every improvised test that he could think of at the moment.

"It sure did, John; it come from that very claim," said Boaz, signing his name to the paper that Mr. Wilkes had completed.

"Out of the shaft?"

"Offen the ore-dump."

"You're a liar," said Mr. Wilkes pleasantly. "There never was enough gold on that whole dump to fill a tooth with."

A sudden thought occurred to him and he sat down upon an up-ended box, laughing till the tears ran down his face.

"Go on," he gasped. "Go on. You two'll be the death of me yit. Only mind you, I don't know nothin' about the matter. I'm just a-rentin' my claim to you two to work, an' I'm in on one-third of it, joke or not. No matter how you git it."

"I'm plain astonished at you, John," said Mr. Dailey in a tone of pained surprise. "We're goin' to work that claim. Of course we've got to get capital to start it with, but we ain't lookin' to have no trouble in gettin' all the capital we want——"

"You won't have—none at all, if you go after it like that," gasped Mr. Wilkes. "You'll git it, an' in the meantime I'll keep this paper."

He folded up the painfully written document and thrust it into his pocket and stood watching the two men who had slowly mounted and were plodding westward into the red-hot dust of the Arizona afternoon.

II

"I TELL you frankly, May, I am getting very tired of stumbling over that young cub, Mr. Needham, every time I enter the house. He is quite as bad as your Aunt Mollie's dogs. I have to stand the dogs, but I simply will not have that youngster. It seems to me that you should have more regard for what you know my wishes are, than to have him here where you know well he is not welcome——"

Miss Allardyce, toying with her grapefruit, made a little grimace at her uncle before she replied sweetly:

"I really do not see why it bothers you, Uncle. He does not come to see you, and as he never comes when you are in the house, I really do not see quite how it can actually annoy you. Since you assure me it does, I will tell him that you do not wish to see him. What time shall I tell him that you will be out?"

"Out? Out? Who the deuce said I would be out? I suppose I have a perfect right to say who shall and who shall not come to my house?"

"You can not well shut the door of your house upon an officer of your own regiment without giving some reason and that a good one. Mr. Needham comes here for two reasons. The first is because I asked him to do so; the second is——"

She paused provokingly, rose and strolled to the long glass that hung between the windows.

"Well, are you or are you not going to finish what you started to say? You have many bad habits, but none so bad as that. Am I to be kept waiting all day to hear your second reason? What the devil *is* your second reason, miss?"

"I have an idea—now mind you, Uncle Jim, it is really no more than an idea. I may not be right—I would not say it, though, unless I had some really good reason for believing my informant to be correct. Any way, I did it all for the best. You know that, don't you, uncle?"

"Good Heavens! Say it! What do you mean by gabbling over what you have to say, like two women talking gossip. Out with it! What does he come here for?"

"I think it's Aunt Mollie," said May Allardyce softly.

For one moment Colonel Borden looked long at his pretty niece. It was a long,

steady look during which Miss Allardyce wondered vaguely if he were on the verge of a paralytic stroke. As he strove vainly for speech his face was as red as the crest of an angry turkey gobbler.

There was nothing for him to say, however, and Miss Allardyce, when she thought of her aunt, of whom she was really very fond, figuring in a flirtation with a bachelor lieutenant of cavalry; her aunt with the stature and the mustache of a Württemberg hussar; her aunt for his marriage with whom it was vaguely whispered in the regiment her uncle had been given his Medal of Honor with its motto: "For Valor," I say when she thought of all this, Miss Allardyce burst into soft laughter.

Colonel Borden boiled over with wrath. He had come down to breakfast a half-hour before in the worst possible temper, so that the cook, noting it, took time to feed the orderly first, so that when the inevitable message should be sent to direct some one to report to the colonel, the orderly at least should not be hungry. She also cautioned the orderly to look out for himself, strongly advising him to be suddenly taken ill and to go on sick report.

"Mind the weather this mornin', Lewis. Th' ol' man's the divvle the day. Sure the C. O. W. (which is army argot for Commanding Officer's Wife) been givin' him what-for since she got up. Norah just told me that they've been rowin' again over Miss May. Sure they always do. It's a pity they can't let the girl alone. She's more sense'n the pair of 'em. Go on sick report I tell you."

ALL colonels of cavalry are peculiar. That is an axiom. If it requires proof, any subaltern of cavalry can give it—to the point of profanity. Colonel Borden was no exception to the rule. An irate troop commander, called upon once to express his idea upon the reason why so many Colonels were peculiar, voiced the generally accepted belief in the words:

"I'll tell you why it is. It's because they're driven crazy when they're captains. That's why it is!"

He was an unbending martinet of the severest school, which means the type which can see no reason or excuse for any shortcoming in any one but himself. No man resents severity provided only it be based on justice. Injustice, severity and incompetence make a bad trinity and have broken the backs of many competent juniors.

He was even worse than his officers called him in the privacy of their own rooms for, to the credit of that regiment be it said, in public they upheld him. No higher praise can be uttered. He was about as bad as the regimental Sergeant-Major called him, which was saying plenty, like a personage mentioned in the Book of Revelations.

He was extremely close in money matters and was never known to entertain any one except the Department Commander on the rare occasions of his visits to the Post; but most of his shortcomings were condoned at least on account of his niece—May Allardyce.

May Allardyce was young and May Allardyce was more than a little pretty. Even the young married ladies of the regiment said so and that is proof incontestable. Also she possessed a quiet charm that made even the more confirmed bachelors think twice about the doubtful advantage that they possessed in times of moving when all they had to do was to pour water on the fire and call the dog. Better still, if that indeed was needed, May Allardyce would be rich in her own right.

Her mother had been Colonel Borden's favorite sister. In so far as he could be said to have shown affection for any one he had shown it for his sister and for her husband, Tom Allardyce, who, dying, left his wife the sole heir to his immense fortune. Unfortunately, she soon followed her husband, and when her will was read it was found to contain the somewhat curious provision that while May was to have a comfortable income when she should come of age on her eighteenth birthday yet she would not inherit the bulk of the property in its entirety until she was twenty-one years of age.

She was forbidden to marry before her twenty-first birthday.

People, seeing her denied nothing that money could buy, from the days of her first living with the Bordens, at first thought that her luxuries were the outcome of avuncular affection. No one knew that Tom Allardyce had left nearly three millions of dollars to the pretty little girl who was a favorite with every one of the officers and most of their wives.

As a matter of fact, it was not generally known. Colonel Borden, her uncle, was also her guardian, and he had no mind to surrender, until the latest possible moment, his stewardship over the pleasant little bungalow on Chesapeake Bay that boasted the finest duck-shooting on the Eastern waters, nor the cottage at Palm Beach where he could have as guests men whose words would mean much if he should ever desire a pleasant detail in Washington, the Mecca of old officers.

Thus is it done. Kissing goes by favor and there are many kinds of kisses. He returned to the charge:

"I fail to see why you want that 'Shavetail' "—a generic army title for an officer of less than five years' service, derived probably from the fact that when young mules are first purchased for the service, the contractor has their tails shaved to tell them from the other mules—"hanging around you all day. Why don't you like Captain Evans?"

"He has had two wives, Uncle Jim——"

"The fatal gift of beauty," said her uncle savagely. Evans was so ugly that it was a common report in the regiment that even his own dog ran away from him.

"Striker then?"

"He has white eyes and he sniffles——"

"Johnson then. Ha! You've got nothing to say, have you? What fault can you find with Mr. Johnson?"

Case-hardened as May Allardyce was to her uncle's unpleasantnesses even she lacked courage to tell her uncle that her chief objection to Mr. Johnson lay in the fact that he was known to be the Colonel's pet and was strongly suspected of being a tale-bearer. Let a man once get that reputation in the army; let him once be known as a "boot-licker"—one who curries favor by adroitly pandering to the weaknesses of a superior—and that man had better hang himself.

MAY ALLARDYCE, her breakfast finished, sat contemplatingly eying her uncle as he fussed about the room, picking up a cigar here, a paper there, and when he stamped out upon the sunlit porch with a testy call of, "Orderly!" she breathed a sigh of relief.

Mr. Needham, a hundred yards farther down the Line, as Officers' Line is commonly called, standing discreetly on the off side of his horse, busied himself with a refractory stirrup-leather till he saw the broad back of his superior disappear in the administration building, when he walked lightly up the Line and entered the forbidden ground.

"No poaching, please. Uncle is as mad as —as—" May stopped for a simile. "Oh, Gerald, he said all kinds of nasty things this morning. He's awful——"

"Of course he is. Show me the man who denies it."

Mr. Needham promptly drew the girl behind the sheltering vines that massed on the end of the porch. What took place under those vines is no business of yours or of mine, but Mrs. Fanter, who lived next door, nearly got a stiff neck through twisting her head around the corner of her sitting-room window to get a clear look. She found that she could not see them from her bedroom.

"It's perfectly disgusting," she declaimed to her bosom friend, Mrs. Burr. "My dear, I sat and watched them for twenty minutes. Every one knows that he is crazy about her and that she has just flung herself at his head. Every one knows that Colonel Borden hates young Mr. Needham and that he will not allow any one but his own pets to show May any attentions. No, my dear, I must say I do not think she is exactly pretty —and there they stood for a half hour. I saw them as plainly as I see you this minute. He had his arms about her and her head was on his shoulder and he was kissing her. Simply disgusting, I call it——"

The episode under the vines, however, that so upset Mrs. Fanter did not affect Needham seriously. Fifteen minutes later Miss Allardyce reappeared, very flushed as to her countenance, and very bright as to the eyes.

"I tell you, darling," quoth Mr. Needham, "I do not want to be disrespectful in speaking of your uncle, but he is an old devil——"

"He is! He is worse than *that*, if I could only think of what to call him."

"He is very foolish. Every one knows that he is trying to make you accept the attentions of his own favorites here: Evans—he's a nice enough fellow—or Striker—or Johnson. It is a purely personal dislike that he has taken to me and he will not admit that he is wrong. There is nothing that he can show against me or against my record."

"Just let him try it—just once!" said May viciously.

Her pretty chin went up in air. Needham laughed lightly.

"I'm going to propose formally to you—Sweetheart, will you marry me?" he asked quietly, his gleaming eyes belying the quietness.

"Of course I will."

She leaned lightly toward him and he took both hands in his, raising them to his lips and kissing the rosy tinted palms.

"Then—mind you, darling, it will be unpleasant for us both—I am going straight to your uncle and ask him for his consent to our engagement. He is sure to say no, but that doesn't make the least difference in the world. If he says no, he has to give a reason. He is certain to be unpleasant to me and probably to you, but we can not have things go on in this way any longer. It is not fair to either of us. The first thing we know some of these old cats'll be talking about you, and I do not propose to have any one talking about my wife."

She colored warmly at the proud possession of the tone but nodded brightly.

"I didn't think you would have the courage," she said lightly.

"Courage? I? Why I'd charge hell with a bucket of water for *you!* Meet me in an hour at the tennis-court. Will you—just one——"

That "one" multiplied by ten being completed and a very thoroughly kissed young lady having vanished into the house, Gerald Needham went jauntily to the office.

If the red face of the orderly standing just outside the door of the Holy of Holies had not informed him that the official barometer of courtesy registered low that morning, Needham would have read it the moment he stepped inside the door of the adjutant's office, which led to the Colonel's room, for the adjutant, his face bent low over his desk, was red to the top of his scalp and he toiled with a fervor that was too feverish to have lasted long. He looked up as Needham, with a cheerful: "Hello, Burke! What's new?" entered the room.

"*Sshl Sshl*" cautioned the shocked adjutant.

"What's the matter? Anybody dead?" queried the unimpressed Needham.

"Shut up, you —— fool! The old man's on the rampage this morning."

"Ah! And I suppose every one in the whole round world must tremble and [illegible] tow until it pleases his august majesty to shed the light of his countenance upon us once again. Hence, slave, and tell thy master I defy him. Give him my gage—it's twelve-bore—double choked since I've been here! *Sigi Dagupan*, Burke, there's a good chap. Tell the old man that I'd like a few moments' conversation with him. That is, I mean I want a chance to do about two minutes' talking myself. Not for him to do it. As I said, Burke, *sigi Dagupan!*"

That word, or expression rather, has been the shibboleth of the new army. By which I mean the army that had its beginning in 1898.

CAPTAIN BURKE disappeared into the inner office [illegible] nous clearing of the throat, which was to the Colonel what the rasping throat chuckle at the sight of fresh meat is to the cage-born lion, announced that the Old Man was ready for a meal. Needham entered.

"Good morning, sir."

"Hm! What do you want? To see me?"

"No, sir. To speak to you for a moment."

"Well, you will have to be quick, sir. Don't you see I am busy?"

"So am I, sir. I will not take more than a few minutes of your time. I have come, Colonel Borden, to speak to you on a private matter. I wish to ask your consent to my marriage to your niece——"

For three long minutes an awful silence reigned, a silence that was broken only by the ticking of the office clock and by the shuffling of papers in the office of the adjutant.

Needham looked at his superior with some curiosity. Colonel Borden was almost bursting with illy suppressed rage, his face mottled red and white like a well-marbled piece of ham as he stared at Needham from behind his desk. Presently:

"What—? What—? Mr. Needham, sir! This is the most unparalelled piece of impertinence that even you have ever been guilty of——"

Needham's eyes grew steely in their intensity and his mouth set in tense, [illegible] cut lines. Any one who knew him [illegible] have told Colonel Borden what that [illegible]

meant. His voice was as sweet as strained honey, but there was a ring in it that meant fight.

"Colonel Borden, I must inform you with all respect that I permit no man living to speak to me in this way. I have come to you to prefer a formal request because that form is prescribed by convention. I knew when I came what your answer would be. That makes no difference. I shall not permit you to insult me. My record, both personal and official, is clean except for one slurring remark that you yourself placed upon my efficiency report which an inspector decided was the result of personal prejudice on your part. My income is the income of any officer of my grade. I am not in debt a cent. Miss Allardyce has honored me by——"

"Leave my office, sir!"

"I warn you, sir. One more word in that tone and manner and I will request an official investigation of you and your methods by an Inspector General. I will not allow you to be discourteous to me simply because you think that you can get away with it because you are a Colonel and I a mere lieutenant so unfortunate as to be placed under your command. Is your answer 'yes' or 'no,' sir?"

"No! No! A thousand times no, sir! You are not to speak to her again. Do you understand that?"

"One moment, Colonel Borden. You seem to strangely misunderstand both your position and my own. If I have done anything to merit such a diatribe as you have favored me with, I merit a trial. I know very well, sir, that if you had the slightest grounds for preferring charges against me you would have done so long ago. So long as I am who I am and my record such as it is, I shall insist on and require, sir, from you the same courtesy that I in turn am required to show. As for your consent to our marriage, I never expected you to give it. I asked it as mere formality, and I tell you frankly, sir, that as soon as May is twenty-one, next month, we intend to be married either with or without that consent. Good morning, sir!"

He stepped out into the hall and, meeting the white-faced orderly, whose mouth was hanging open like the mouth of a fish, he realized that every word of his conversation had been overheard and would be common property by noon.

III

GERALD NEEDHAM went to his quarters in a dangerously quiet mood. Furiously angry as he was, he was quite aware of the fact that the slightest false move on his part now would bring Colonel Borden upon him, as he expressed it, "Like a duck on a June bug."

So far, his own demeanor and conduct had been perfectly correct and within the spirit and the letter of the regulations, but he knew that if he should make the least slip from the standard of official correctness he would receive no mercy. Evans, Striker, Johnson, could miss morning stables, be late for drill, forget to sign the book for official papers, and nothing would happen; but let him do one of these sins and he would figure as the accused before a General Court-martial. Now, however, that open war had been declared, he knew where he stood and could prepare for any move of the enemy.

The first move came when, being engaged in changing from riding-boots to tennis shoes, he heard a knock at the door. A sprucely clad orderly entered at the shouted, "Come in."

"I have a paper here, sir, for the lieutenant."

Needham took the paper, signed the book and opened the envelope. It was a typewritten order on which the ink was not yet dry and it read:

> 1st Lt. Gerald Needham, 16th Cav., and ten men will proceed at once, mounted, to the International Boundary Line west of, and in the vicinity of, Preciosa for the purpose of enforcing the Neutrality Laws.
>
> Rations for thirty days will be taken.
>
> The detachment will take no tentage but shelter tents.
>
> By order of Col. Borden
> John Burke
> Capt. 16th Cav.
> Adjutant.

"Darn his old skin! First move to him. This is the first time in the history of this Post that an officer has had to go into the field without a tent. He'd send me out naked if he dared."

"Sir, the adjutant directed me to tell the lieutenant that Sergeant Wilson has been directed to report to him for orders. The Commanding Officer directs that the lieutenant leave in an hour."

"All right. There is no reply, orderly."

The soldier saluted and left, passing, as he went out, Sergeant Wilson, who was coming up the steps to get his orders.

"All right, sergeant. I know all about it. Tell the first sergeant to make the detail and notify the men yourself so they can get ready. Tell the quartermaster, sergeant, to pack at once thirty days' rations for eleven men and overhaul the pack-saddles and look over the mules. You will need seven pack-mules. The forage will be sent by wagon, of course. We will leave in an hour. Have the trumpeter saddle my horse and bring him to the door in half an hour."

Sergeant Wilson saluted and departed and Needham set to work rolling up his bedding, filling his flask and canteen and packing up what few little luxuries he could carry that would make life more endurable on that hell-hole of a border.

He well knew what his life would be. He had been there before for two months in very nearly the same locality. He would make his camp as near water as he could, and the nearer to it he got, the more trouble would he have with the cattle stampeding in from the range to get at the water. Twice he had had his own horses stampeded by it, costing him two days of hard work to get them again.

For a mile around his camp the ground would be covered with the dead bodies of cattle that had died within the past year in their attempt to get to water, only too often dying when in sight of it, but too weak to reach it. He would have flies, thousands of them, almost as big as sparrows, bred in those same dead cattle. He would be afflicted with dust-storms that would follow him around by day and go to bed with him at night. He would exist in a temperature of never less than 100 degrees, and he would learn all over again to smoke tobacco that was half wind-blown cow-dung.

That would be by day. By night it would be different, for as soon as the darkness should shut down and the sun drop below the saw-toothed range of the raw, red, Western hills there would come a wind out of the desert—a raw cold wind that would drive the men inside their tiny shelter-tents for very warmth, where they would shiver in their clothes and one blanket till sun-up.

There would be alarms from people unheard of about parties unknown who were always just about to [illegible] the border with arms and ammunition but who never got there. The point where they [illegible] the line would always be [illegible] He would be rolling and [illegible] freezing and shivering by night [illegible] striving to enforce law [illegible]

HIS orders given [illegible] placed upon the porch where the packers could get it when the mules were ready, he buckled on his revolver and went to the tennis-court where May was waiting for him. She caught sight of him when he was a hundred yards away and ran toward him, swinging her racket.

"What's the matter—dear?" she almost whispered, seeing him in field garb. "Is there any trouble?"

"Only for us, I'm sorry to say—sweetheart." His voice lingered over the sweetest word in the English language, and he caught the hand that held the racket, careless of who might see.

"Your respected and revered old uncle has seen fit to send me an order sending me to Preciosa on field duty for a month."

"What? Why, Gerald, you only came back last month. You can't be next on the roster. Are you?"

"Of course not. There are five lieutenants here who have not been out at all. It's because I had the temerity to fall in love with you."

"What?"

Needham nodded.

"He was so mad," he said, grinning at the recollection, "that I thought for a moment he was going to burst. I remember being grateful for the fact that he did not burst on me!"

"What did he say, Gerald?" asked Miss Allardyce, giggling.

"Pardon me. I never use such language."

"Tell me at once—dear!" she entreated, half tearfully. Needham relented.

"He said a lot of things. First he said: 'No, No, No,' five or six times; then he said the first word of 'God Save the King' and mixed that up with a [illegible] words in which I understood him to express a positive conviction as to my ultimate destiny. He was rather comprehensive in his statements and he was so mad that I expected to see him burst into a blaze. I only got the order a few minutes ago. I go to Preciosa."

"What did you tell him, Gerald?"

"I told him that I was asking him for his permission to marry you because I thought it was the proper thing to make a request like that, but that I was going to marry you whether he liked it or not just as soon as you are twenty-one years of age."

"You dear—I think I'd like to kiss you, Gerald. I think he's perfectly horrid, but I'm not going to let *him* see it."

She thought for a moment, then, slipping her hand under his arm, she pulled him lightly under the shade of a giant cottonwood tree that shaded the court.

"Gerald," she said presently, "I am going to speak seriously for a moment. Have we been simply flirting with each other to pass away the time?"

The youngster's face whitened slowly under her words. He looked at her steadily for a moment, his eyes narrowing to pinpoints. He noted the quick, warm flush that mounted from cheek to brow and he saw her eyes, which were as the eyes of a bride, and his own face cleared.

"You know better," he said simply. "You know, dear heart, that it is for ever and ever."

"Then before you go away today, write a request for a leave of absence for four months to take effect a month from Tuesday. Tuesday will be the eighteenth. Can you get it?"

"The old—I mean your uncle—will disapprove my request, of course; but what is the use of having an uncle who is a United States Senator if I can't get a little thing like that. Certainly I can get it. Why? What is your plan?"

The girl flushed again, even more warmly than before.

"I thought," she said in an embarrassment that was delightful to see, "that a month from Tuesday will be the eighteenth and that is my birthday. I will be twenty-one and no longer under Uncle Jim's control. Well—then—then—if you really want me——"

She had no opportunity to finish her speech, for long before she could say any more she found herself gathered into a pair of brown-shirted arms, her lovely, blushing face hidden beneath the brim of his campaign hat.

Twenty minutes later, having received his final orders from the adjutant, Needham left the Post with his little detachment, and threading the narrow dust-ribbon of a trail, with his pack-mules well closed up ahead of him, pulled out on the trail for Preciosa.

He had hastily written a letter requesting a leave of absence for four months, so his conscience was perfectly clear on that point, though he knew right well that Colonel Borden would never approve it, and for the first part of the ride he was busily framing mentally a night letter to be sent from Preciosa, when he should get an opportunity, to United States Senator James Needham which was calculated to make that gentleman sit up and rub his head.

IT WAS not a long ride as rides go, only twenty miles, but the road was dusty beyond the power of words to describe and there was no scenery. He knew it of old. The *chug, chug, chug* of the walking horses in the dust, varied by an occasional short trot where the prairie-dog holes were fewest, till finally they topped the last divide from which they could see Preciosa, a brown blot on a browner plain.

It is only in novels that cavalry moves at a gallop. On a campaign or in the field every cavalryman knows that luck is on his side if he can always move his entire troop at a walk. To be able to walk and trot equally is the gift of the gods.

He was glad when they drew up in the dust of the corral and dismounted to water the horses at ten cents a head. Mr. Wilkes met him at the pump, greeting him with a toothless grin.

"Hello, son. Just in from the Post?"

"Yep. Hello, Mr. Wilkes. Glad to see you. What's new?"

"Greaser baby over at Juan Morello's is the newest thing I know of, but you ain't interested in that—not yit, hey?"

"No. Any arms around here. Any talk of smuggling?"

Mr. Wilkes flung his arms wide.

"Good Lord, Lieutenant. You know as well as me what's here. There ain't nothin'. Now if we only had water—we could do anything if we had water. If we only had one-inch rainfall in a whole year we could raise all kinds of vegetables."

Needham looked his disbelief. Mr. Wilkes snorted.

"Oh, we kin. You needn't look like that. Some day we'll irrigate this place an' then

we'll show the world. Do you know Broad-Ax Smith up at Pestilente?"

"No. Why?"

"He bought a thousand acres of land last year fer twenty dollars an' he sunk a three-inch pipe well fer two thousand dollars. It irrigated exactly one acre. Son, he started in to raise vegetables an' he's raised stuff enough offen that one acre to pay fer all the rest. He carted the greens over to the railroad an' sold 'em to the eatin'-houses an' he was makin' the dollars just roll in when one of his burros turned hisself loose an' kicked out four of Broad-Ax's front teeth. When they growed in again——"

"Oh, here! A man's front teeth don't grow in again——"

"Son, I'm a-tellin' you this here story to teach you somethin'. You kin raise anything here in Arizona if you'll only irrigate? The doctor had Broad-Ax irrigatin' his mouth fer three weeks— Where you goin'?"

"To buy you a drink, you old pirate. Come on."

Mr. Wilkes followed him inside the store and set forth a gaudily dressed bottle that was labelled "Cow-punchers' Delight."

"Where're you goin' to camp, son?" he asked over the drinks.

"Over by Dailey's place, I reckon. The same old place. I reckon that's the nearest place to water."

"Yep. That's right. An', say, Lieutenant, while you're over there you keep a good look-out. There's been some cattle rustlin' bein' done over there lately. Boaz an' Dailey has lost quite a lot of Hereford cattle that they was keepin' up in the pasture, an' they've got a lot of hosses in there now. They claim them greaser soldiers come across the line an' cut the fence an' run the cattle off. If they done that with cattle, they'll do it a lot quicker fer hosses. They need them fer their cavalry, you know. The line's only five hundred yards from their fence-corner."

"Hm! I'm sorry to hear they lost any stock. I'll do what I can to prevent it in the future. When you see Dailey and Boaz, Mr. Wilkes, tell 'em to come over an' see me, will you?"

"I will so. Good-by. *Vaya con Dios*, as the greasers say."

Needham shook hands with him and rode off to the westward with his men. Mr. Wilkes stood looking after him for a moment till he faded away, swallowed up by the swirling dust.

"He's a good youngster," he said reflectively; "a good youngster. I wish there was more like him down here."

IV

THE line runs due east and west from Preciosa, and they made their camp a mile to the west, where the corner of the wire fence that enclosed the great two-thousand-acre pasture where Dailey and Boaz kept their stock, was within five hundred yards of the international line.

At that point the boundary was marked by a great sheet-iron monument standing upon a small, rocky hill. The monument was marked upon its northern face with the arms of the United States of America, while the southern face showed the eagle, standon a cactus, grasping a serpent in its talons, the symbol of Mexican supremacy since the days when in 1325 the Acolhuans over-ran the country from the north.

It was not an imposing camp. Five shelter tents standing in one line, spreading their brown canvas to the sun, showed where the ten men slept. At one end of this line was the improvised kitchen, made by simply scraping a narrow trench in the dirt, the length lying in the direction of the prevailing winds; at the other end of the line stood the shelter tent where Needham slept and in front of the line of tents lay the "griund-line," two lariats stretched between two stunted mesquit bushes where the horses and the mules were tied.

The water-hole was about a hundred yards to the north. For work they could ride for fifty miles over the inhospitable brown *mesa* that lay like an oven under the semi-tropical sun; for diversion they could watch the prairie dogs that yip-yapped incessantly, ducking into their holes at the first sign of life from the camp.

"Four men will remain in camp all the time, sergeant. We will have to have some one here permanently to look after the stock. There will be three patrols to go out daily. One of two men will ride east for about ten miles and one will ride west about ten miles, returning by sundown. The other two men will watch the railroad and the station at Preciosa. Who's that coming in now?"

"It's me, Dailey, Lieutenant. How are you?"

The cowpuncher rode up to the cook-fire and dismounted, leaving his rein-chains dangling. He strode forward with outstretched hand, for he knew Needham and liked him, as did most men who came in contact with him.

"You're the very man I wanted most to see, Dailey. John Wilkes told me that you and Boaz have lost some stock lately. Is it true?"

"Yes. It was about a month ago. We had driven in a lot of Hereford cattle to fatten up, an' had 'em corralled in the big pasture yonder. That's what I've come to speak to you about. The fence was cut by some Mexicans and some of the stock was run off. I think a man named Lopez was mixed up in it. He was a man we fired some time ago on suspicion. There's no question about it, Lieutenant; they do run stock off here an' take it across the border. They sneak over at night, sometimes bringin' cattle over that they swap off here to some of the Mexican residents for stolen ponies. Sometimes they don't trouble to bring no cattle along. They just naturally pinch the ponies, payin' fer 'em with the loose end of a lariat."

"Have you any idea how they do it?"

"Mostly they cut our fence an' steal some outen our herd. You see our boundary fences run down like the letter V, with the point right here, not more'n five hundred yards from the line. Naturally they cut it right at the point. That's because a horse, if he's stampeded, runs straight to the rear. If they cut it on the long side, the horses might git scared an' scatter. If they cut it at the point an' the horses scare, they'll just run back in the pasture. You kin count on it that if they do come over an' try to cut the fence they'll do it right here. More'n that, the grass has been burned off near the water-hole an' with the new grass comin' up here all the herd'll be grazin' right down here. If you'll just watch this fence you'll see somethin', I think."

"I'll do better than that, Dailey——"

"You see, Lieutenant, if they run any stock off, they'll run 'em off along the lowland in the bottom." He pointed to the "draw," as lowland is generally called in the Southwest, in which lay the water-hole. "They won't dare take the cattle over the hilltops. Your men'd see 'em against the skyline. You needn't worry none. They won't try it till full moon, an' that's two weeks away yit. I'll sit down awhile if you don't mind. Boaz's gone up into the foothills to round up some cattle."

So down he sat and talked late into the night. Rough as he was, he had a keen sense of humor and a stock of stories of the range that, told with Rabelaisian humor, moved Needham to laughter so that he was genuinely sorry when his guest rose.

"I'll see you soon again," Dailey said as he swung into saddle. "Me an' Boaz'll be over often. *Adios.*"

Needham, still smiling over the last story, sat listening to the patter of his pony's feet among the rocks till the last echoes died away in the night.

THE next day, after much thought, he sent a man with a pack-mule into Preciosa on a mission that greatly puzzled that hard-riding trooper. Needham wanted six empty coal-oil cans.

A great light dawned upon the detachment when they were called upon to hang the cans to the top wire of the wire fence, one empty can near each post near the point of the V. In each can Needham placed a great rock.

"I learned it in the Moro country," he deigned to explain. "A man always cuts a wire fence near the post. I don't know why, but he does. Well, when he cuts the wire, the can'll drop an' the rock in it'll make enough noise to wake the dead. You'll be able to hear it all over camp. That'll do, Brown."

Day after day the patrols rode the line vigilantly. Day after day they returned hot and dusty, longing for the cool beer that the temperance people, in that outburst of fanatical enthusiasm that leads people to deny to others what they themselves do not like, had forbidden them.

Each day, too, brought its new baseless rumor. Once word came that a flying machine was about to smuggle field-guns across the line to the rebels. Needham got word of it by a personal note sent by Colonel Borden himself and the orderly nearly killed his horse to get the note in promptly. Him the men jeered openly. Again a report came that bombs were being shipped across the line packed in firewood and carried on the backs of burros. There

being no firewood nearer than Fort Stevens, the report was discounted.

With the waxing of the moon, however, he grew more cautious; but it was not until one night about two weeks after his arrival that anything actually happened.

His letter requesting his four months' leave of absence had been returned to him bearing the one word, "Disapproved." The Colonel had evidently written it himself, and the very period after the word expressed ire. Needham, expecting no less, upon receiving the letter, saddled his horse and rode in to Preciosa to send the night letter to his uncle. The message despatched and its urgency explained, he was walking his horse slowly along the moonlit road when his quick ear caught the unmistakable sound of iron striking against rock. He reined in his horse in the shadow of a mesquit bush.

Clear and distinct above him, he saw silhouetted against the skyline the heads of two men, sombrero-covered, leaning toward each other in talk. A moment later, as he watched, he saw two lean horses' heads come into view over the hilltop above the trail.

The sound of the hoof-beats on the rocks ceased. Once he heard an impatient stamping among the rocks and the jingle of bit-rings, then a voice that said in clear, sonorous Spanish:

"*Alto! El hijo de la——*"

Needham heard no more and it was just as well that he did not hear it. He knew the Mexican people well enough to be able to fill in the hiatus, for there are no fouler-swearing people on earth than the Spanish-speaking peoples. Compared with Spanish even Arabic, which is said to be a language specially devised for the use of the afflicted, becomes mere childish prattle.

The two men were on the trail between him and his camp. If they were engaged in an attempt to run off cattle or stock, he was convinced that the two men had been placed so far out in order that they could give the alarm if any one came along the trail from the direction of Preciosa. The main attempt would be made nearer to the camp itself, just as Dailey had prophesied.

Either of two courses was open to him. He could gallop down the trail toward his camp, taking the chance of a shot as he rode, or he could sneak up to the hillside above the trail and work along the crest till he had passed the two men, when he could regain his camp. He chose the latter and, dismounting, he led his horse straight up the hillside down which the two men had come, keeping off the rocks as well as he could in the darkness.

Up, up, up he worked as slowly and as carefully as a scout works in war-time when developing a ridge that is suspected of hiding a foe. Once a step of his horse sent a volley of shale rock clattering down the slope, making noise enough to wake the dead. A horse whinnied in the darkness and only his quick grasp on the nostrils of his own steed kept him from replying. He stood in perfect silence for a moment, holding up one forefoot of his horse so that he should not make any noise by pawing the loose shale of the hillside.

A deep-toned voice down on the trail said clearly:

"*Es nada. Nada pero un conejo*—It is nothing but a rabbit—*Alerta!*—Be quick!"

And again he worked his way along the hillside.

HE HAD reached a point on the hillside almost directly opposite his own camp and was about to swing into the saddle and make a dash for his own detachment when, clear and distinct, his ears caught the clang of a falling can; then a second clang echoed in the silence; then a third! A point of flame spat out into the darkness and a gun-shot jarred the night.

"Halt! Who goes there?" came the quick challenge of the sentry in the camp.

No time now to ponder over what to do. He pitched into his saddle and spurred into a headlong gallop down the slope, regardless of the prairie-dog holes that yawned for the leaping near-fore, and as his horse took the slope he worked his revolver from the holster.

He heard curses behind him that were followed by a shot and his campaign hat jerked forward over his eyes and he was suddenly aware of a sharp pain in his left thigh as if a red-hot iron had been passed across it. The next moment he had swung his horse into the trail and thundered up the far slope into his camp.

The men had got to their rifles and were standing ready for the orders that came quick and fast.

"Two of you take your horses—never mind saddling and bridling them—and ride

hell-for-leather to where this draw crosses the line. Stop any one who attempts to pass you. If they do not stop, shoot!

"Sergeant Wilson, take two more men and get to the fence and reinforce the patrol there. Shoot any one you see who will not surrender. Mind you don't shoot Dailey or Boaz. York, you and Wentworth take your lariats and stretch them along the gap in the fence where the wires have been cut. You can find the gaps by looking where the cans are down. The rest of you come with me!"

There were only two men left to follow him and they did not follow very far, for as soon as he reached the level ground in the bottom of the draw, his left leg shut up under him and he fell prostrate, gasping:

"Go on, men. There're two men farther on down the trail. Get them. Bring 'em in or show me where they're lyin'. Go on, you fools. I'm hit."

Two shots from the neighborhood of the fence broke the silence, followed by the thunder of several horses in a mad stampede. The lone sentry in the camp fired twice and then he heard the stinging crack of a rifle fired down by the line. Again he heard the whirling rush of galloping horses till the very air seemed full of it. Then came a long silence—he had fainted.

When he regained consciousness—and it could not have been more than five minutes later—he heard his men calling to each other from hilltop to hilltop. He rolled over and working his revolver from the holster, fired straight up in the air. Presently a man broke from the bushes and ran down to him as he lay in the low scrub. It was Earle, one of his own men, who almost stumbled over him. Passing his arm about his wounded officer, he raised him bodily from the ground.

"Hurt bad, sir?"

"I don't know, Earle. Got a match?"

"Yes, sir."

A hastily struck match showed a gaping tear across the leg into which one could have laid a finger. It was bleeding freely and the khaki breeches were blood-soaked almost as far as the knee.

"Only a flesh wound after all," grunted Needham. "I don't see why I keeled over. Give me your first-aid package, Earle."

The trooper tore it loose from his belt and opening it, tied the bandage adroitly about the wound, which was bad enough to have bled much without being serious. With the man's aid, Needham got to his feet and hobbled back to the camp, where he found the men gathered by the replenished fire.

"Anything to report, Sergeant Wilson?"

"Yes, sir. I captured one man down by the fence. Caught him in the act of cuttin' the wires. Lowe shot the pony of another one. The rest of 'em got off, I reckon, sir. They was tryin' to do just what Mr. Dailey said they would."

"Did they succeed in running off any stock?"

"Not a hair, sir!"

"Take a light and examine the dead pony for his brand and bring the prisoner to me."

Sergeant Wilson hastened off to do his bidding and presently a soldier stepping forward into the ring of the firelight, said—

"Here's the prisoner, sir!"

HE WAS a most villainous-looking Mexican, black-bearded and dirty, weighted down by three bandoliers filled with cartridges, but he rolled his cigarette with the *insouciance* that only a Mexican or a Spaniard can affect, while Needham, seated upon a saddle on the ground, questioned him.

"*No intende, señor*—I do not understand—" however, being the only reply to his questions, he very soon desisted.

"I'd make you understand if I had you fer an hour in the bush," growled the angry sergeant. "There ain't no better teacher of English than a good revolver lanyard used about a foot below the shoulders. Sir," he added, "I examined the pony that was shot. It is one of the Lazy B brand, but it's been vented an' there's no new brand on him that I can see."

By which Sergeant Wilson meant that the pony had originally been branded with the letter B lying down, but that some one had crossed it out.

"An' I can tell you about that," said a voice behind them.

Needham turned to find himself face to face with Dailey.

"Hello, Dailey. Go ahead then. Tell me what you can. Do you know the man?"

Dailey walked over to the man and looked him over critically.

"Sure I know him. His name's Lopez. He used to work fer us. What'll you do with him?"

"Turn him over to the sheriff, I suppose,

an' let the civil authorities prosecute him for attempted horse-stealin'. Lord, but this leg does hurt."

Dailey started, looked at Needham's white face and quickly pulling a flask from his pocket, forced a drink down the youngster's throat.

"You git on your back as quick as you kin, Lieutenant, an' keep the blood outen that leg. If you've got any report to make, write it out an' I'll put it on the wire fer you at Preciosa."

Needham wrote a brief report of the occurrence on a page from his notebook and gave it to the stockman to be telegraphed to the Post and, this done, bared his leg and with Dailey's assistance examined the wound. The cow-puncher breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was afeared it was a high-power bullet. You'll be all right in a day or two. It's only a scratch. It ain't touched bone ner muscle. Now—" he gave a last touch to the rough bandage—"you're as good as new. Keep out of the sun all you kin. Did you tell 'em to send the doctor?"

"No. I didn't tell them I've been hurt. Don't you say a word about it either, Dailey. You see, I do not stand in very well with the Old Man——"

"Who wants to?" growled Dailey. "A man don't pet ground-rattlers."

"—And if he thought there was any chance of there being any real work to do down here that'd bring any credit to a man, he'd relieve me and send one of his own pets down here."

"Johnson?" queried Dailey, who knew both that officer and the Colonel.

"Very likely. Beside that, old man, there's another reason. There's a girl at the Post who would worry a lot if she knew I've been hurt."

"There most generally is a girl somewhere," said Dailey, looking at him with kindly eyes.

"So you see I only reported about the attempt to steal the horses and the capture of the thief and I will not 'peep' about the row. See?"

"Aye, I see. I won't open my head about it to a soul, Lieutenant, but I want to say right here an' now that we owe you somethin', me an' Boaz, an' we generally manage to pay our debt. Your friend the Colonel'll swear to that before we're through with him. I ain't a-goin' to thank you. You done your duty, an' a feller don't want thanks fer doin' that, but—well, maybe the day'll come when I'll be able to show you that me an' Boaz ain't the forgettin' kind."

He swung on his pony and cantered off down the trail toward Preciosa, leaving Needham staring after him in the moonlight.

V

NEEDHAM'S telegram, discreetly worded, created no disturbance at the Post, but Colonel Borden, being constitutionally unable to allow any one to perform undisturbed the work to which he had been assigned, telegraphed reams of instructions as to the manner in which the prisoner should be turned over to the sheriff.

It is doubtful if any prisoner being transferred to the military fortress of Peter and Paul was ever surrounded by such formalities. All of which instructions having been duly received were read by Needham with an assiduity worthy of a better cause and then were promptly cremated in the troop fire.

No word having been received at the Post of his wound, no one worried, least of all May Allardyce, who got her daily letter, which was delivered by the orderly at the house after her uncle had departed for the office where he made the adjutant miserable for three hours every morning. Each time she received a letter, May went through the regular formality of crossing off the calendar one more day. The eighteenth was marked with a huge red "M," for that day was, if their plans did not miscarry, to be literally a red-letter day.

"I will not say a word to advise you," she wrote Needham, "but will leave the making of the plans to you. It would seem ridiculous if, being ready and willing to trust my entire future life in your hands, I should demur at any plans you make. Decide on what you think best to do and let me know in time to make my arrangements."

But Needham could do nothing until he should get an answer to his night letter to his uncle. Everything hinged on that, so, writing May to have patience, he told her that he could not properly plan until he could get a reply to his request for the four months' leave.

It came one night when it was least expected, when a trooper, returning from

Preciosa late at night, rode up to his little fire and handed Needham the brown envelope that meant so much to him.

"A telegram for the lieutenant, sir."

Needham thanked him and tore it open. A moment later the astonished men stared at an apparently demented officer who danced about the fire forgetful of his game leg.

"Good old Uncle Jim!" he muttered, unfolding the telegram and reading it again and again as if to convince himself that it was true.

LT. GERALD NEEDHAM, 16TH CAV.
PRECIOSA, ARIZONA:

Four months leave granted you. Take effect 18th inst. Copy of order mailed your Regimental Commander today. NEEDHAM.

"Whoo-oo—oop! Who's the man who wants to do away with the United States Senate. It's the greatest body of lawmakers in the world. Oh, what a letter I'll have to write to May tonight. She wanted detailed plans— She'll get 'em now—and won't the Old Man swear!"

He got out paper and pencil and wrote feverishly:

A telegram that I have just received tells me that my leave is granted, to begin on the eighteenth —your birthday. OUR WEDDING-DAY! Now, darling, listen very carefully, and I will tell you what to do. On the eighteenth, you being twenty-one years of age, will be no longer under your uncle's control in any way. If I return to the Post and we arrange to marry there, it is quite within the realms of possibility that the old devil would order me off the Post and, it may be, you too.

Pack a suitcase and leave the Post unknown to any one, on the mail-stage that leaves the Post-Office at the Fort at eight-thirty the morning of the eighteenth. It reaches Preciosa about noon in time to put the mail-sacks on the noon train for the East. The train does not stop here. I will meet you with a buckboard about two miles out on the Post Road, and we will get on the noon train for the East at Catlin's Crossing, which is a flag stop about three miles west of Preciosa. I will write and get a license and have a minister on the train and we will be married as soon as we get on the car. We will send a telegram to your uncle after it is all over, so that he can rejoice with us.

Be very sure to do exactly as I tell you, because the slightest change might spoil everything. All you have to do is to pack your suitcase and start for Preciosa on the stage on the morning of the eighteenth. I will attend to everything else.

ALWAYS excepting a condemned criminal awaiting the day set for his execution, to no man does the time pass so slowly as to the prospective bridegroom. It was even worse than usual to Needham, who knew nothing of either state. Patrolling, always tiresome and monotonous work, grew doubly so to him. Even Dailey, who met him frequently now on his rides, found him growing more and more touchy.

"What ails you?" he asked one day with the direct frankness of the Southwest. "Leg hurt you?"

Needham, who had for days longed for some one to whom he could speak, threw restraint to the winds.

"No. That isn't it. I'm going to be married, Dailey."

"Does the girl know it?" asked the interested Mr. Dailey.

"She does. She is the niece of that old devil up at the Fort——"

Dailey looked at him as one can imagine the onlookers gazing at the leaders of a forlorn hope.

"Say, son, you've got the nerve! She ain't like him, I reckon——"

"Not much! I don't know how he'll take it. He'll bust, I reckon. What's the matter with you?" he asked suspiciously, for Mr. Dailey was rocking to and fro in his saddle as if suddenly taken ill.

"Oh, nothin'! Nothin'! Only it's somethin' I was thinkin' about an' this here just about puts the gilded Mansard roof on it. We was plannin' a little party fer the ol' devil up there an' with this on top of it——"

He rocked from side to side in renewed laughter.

"The Old Man's forbidden it," said Needham, "so we're goin' to run away——"

"How? Where? Tell me all about it!"

Needham told him and Mr. Dailey slapped his leg in unrestrained mirth.

"That's all *right*, son! You're on, an' here's where I kin help you. I'll go over to the county seat tomorrow an' get the license fer you an' arrange to have a minister on the noon train the day after tomorrow. You might have difficulty doin' that, on account of you not knowin' nobody, but I'll go over tomorrow an' attend to it all fer you. Give me the name of the lady."

Needham wrote it out upon a piece of paper and handed it to Dailey, who thrust it into his pocket.

"I can count on you, can I, Dailey?"

"Son, you saved me an' Beau a good many hundred dollars. You sure could count on it, just fer that; but you're goin' to salt the

Colonel. So am I. Only in another kind o' way. He'll git his—an' git it good! I'll leave on the mornin' train an' by tomorrow night you'll have your license in your pocket, an' the day after tomorrow at this time you'll be makin' a noise like a bridegroom!"

"Don't say anything about it, will you, Dailey?"

"Who? Me? O' course not. Only to Boaz an' to old John Wilkes. He's in the game with me an' Boaz. I'll tell you about it some time. You see, son, it'll be such a blamed good joke on the old Colonel——"

"Joke on the Colonel? Colonel Borden?"

Mr Dailey nodded his head.

"You know he's about as popular about here as a skunk is at a church social—never mind that! He called me 'my man' once, before a gang of politicians, an' they call me that all over the state now—I'll show him! Got any money, Needham?"

Needham, about to take offense at the words, caught the tone and smiled.

"Oh, I guess I've got enough. Much obliged just the same."

"I don't mean that. I mean that me an' Boaz has got what we think is a good thing—in copper it is. It ain't any prospect where you pay a man fer diggin' a hole an' then keep on payin' him as long as he digs. You'd better pay a prairie dog than do that. No, sir! If you've got, say, three hundred dollars——"

"Yes, I've got that much."

"Well, I'll see Boaz tomorrow or the next day an' find out what he knows. He's lookin' it up now. He went up to Pestilente today to look the thing up. We got a pointer that the people that owns the Kincaid Mine is about to beat down the stock to low-water mark so they kin buy it all in fer themselves an' then cut a water-melon in dividends. If there's anything in it, we'll let you in on the ground floor. I'll go tomorrow an' git that license fer you an' the sky-pilot'll be on the job on the noon train the day after tomorrow. *Adios.*"

He swung off down the trail and Needham, glad at heart now that he had taken the cow-puncher into his confidence, rode back to his camp.

THAT afternoon, Johnson coming down to relieve Needham from the command of the little detachment, Needham turned over to him the various orders that he had received from time to time and gave him what information he could. Johnson, however, was not very receptive. He knew too much.

"Dailey and Boaz'll help you all they can," said Needham.

"Ah, indeed." Mr. Johnson smiled his superiority. "So you've been consorting with that crowd? The Colonel said he thought you would. Why, Needham, they're the worst outfit of robbers this country has ever seen. I can't see what you see in them. Coarse, common, vulgar cow-punchers! Colonel Borden says——"

"Oh, —— what Colonel Borden says and you too. The one redeeming feature about this place is that you don't have to listen to him. If you're here for a month, Johnson, you'll have good chance to rest up and get the taste of shoe-polish out of your mouth."

Whereat Mr. Johnson had the grace to lose his temper.

Colonel Borden, however, was not so well satisfied as he might have been. Such an important thing as transferring the command of a detachment of ten men from one officer to another without his being present to interfere was of doubtful propriety. Beside that, there was just one chance in a thousand that, by dropping in on them unexpectedly, he might bring to light some dereliction of duty on the part of Mr. Needham that would justify him in refusing to permit him to take advantage of his leave of absence which had been granted him over the head of his Colonel. Accordingly, he dropped a bomb in the midst of the dinner-table as they sat at dinner on the night of the seventeenth, when he remarked sourly—

"Molly, I'll have to have my breakfast at half-past three in the morning."

"Well, all I have to say is that you'll probably have trouble in getting it. You know very well that the cook does not get here till six—" and so forth *con amore*. Every married man knows it.

"Can I or can I not have what I want and pay for in my own house?" thundered the Colonel. "If you were to spend half as much time in attending to your duties as you spend in telling me how to run this Post——"

"If I didn't run this house any better than you run this Post——"

May rose and pushing her chair back from the table left the room. Her uncle gazed after her triumphantly. If he

thought for one moment, which he did, rejoicing thereat mightily, that she had gone to her room to cry, he was vastly mistaken. She had gone to her room to pack her suitcase and to put it where no prying eye should find it. As she went up the steps she could not help hearing her uncle's last words. He had testily opened the mail that the orderly had brought him. A long, stiff official envelope attracted his attention and eying it eagerly he ripped it open with his dessert-knife. Two long blue checks, each for two hundred dollars, fell out. He picked them up eagerly and then burst forth:

"See what it is to be a fool! I sent my pay accounts to the paymaster two weeks ago and requested him to send me four hundred dollars in small checks so that we could have them cashed here as we needed them. No human being nearer than John Wilkes at Preciosa can cash these checks. I had intended to go there in the morning, anyway, and now this makes it imperative. We've got to have some cash. I've got to go early in the morning. I want to get there so that I can get out to the camp before Mr. Needham has a chance to leave. If he has not fully complied with all the regulations, by the eternal, he shall not go on his leave! I'll stop it!"

"How did he succeed in getting his leave when you had disapproved it?"

"How? By going over my head officially and by invoking some sort of cheap political aid. When he gets back to this regiment, I'll see that he gets a course of training!"

"I suppose his uncle helped him. You know he has an uncle who is a United States Senator. What a pity it is, Colonel, that Mr. Needham is so deep in your black books. If you had only liked him, it is quite within the realms of possibilities that you might have got—oh, well, I do not suppose you will *ever* be a Brigadier-General if no one ever has a chance to know your abilities—if a Colonel today wishes to retire——"

"An uncle—a senator? Why—why, madam!" said the Colonel with the most elaborate politeness that finally gave way under the strain, just as a dam gives way under pressure. "Why in ——, madam, have you kept this from me?"

"I supposed of course you knew it and that you would not allow yourself to be swerved by personal feelings where your principles were involved. I knew that under no circumstances would you allow him to use political aid to help you——"

May heard just this much in her aunt's voice before she fled to her own room, where she buried her face in her pillows to deaden the shrieks of her laughter, which she feared would be heard below stairs. It was simply delicious beyond the power of words to describe. How Gerald, her husband tomorrow, would enjoy it. She blushed at the thought and then came the knowledge that there still remained a way by which she could re-establish friendly relations with her uncle should she ever desire to do so. The very knowledge, too, that she could do so, hurt her, for it was not pleasant to see such veniality even in a man for whom she had long since lost all regard.

She finished packing her suitcase, undressed, brushed her hair and, after writing a farewell note to her aunt, crept into her bed, where she dropped off to sleep, smiling happily.

COLONEL BORDEN, for his part, spent a very pleasant evening in making his wife as thoroughly miserable as only a man of his type can. Finally announcing his intention to leave the Post at half-past three, he went off to bed, leaving his wife in tears.

Promptly at three-thirty, appearing on the scene with a bad temper and an attack of indigestion and finding no breakfast, he stormed out upon the porch and threw himself into the waiting buckboard, paying no attention to the shrieked: "Oh, Colonel! Colonel! Wait a moment! I'll come down and get you a cup of coffee!" that floated down to him from the second story. Like most men in like case, he imagined that somehow he was inflicting an injury upon his wife by going away without his breakfast.

"I'll get some breakfast at old John Wilkes's place. I've got to get him to cash my checks, anyway. I suppose he's got four hundred dollars in his place. Big fool as he is, he ought to be able to cook a simple breakfast for me. I hope I catch that young scoundrel Needham in some dereliction of duty. I'd just like to show him what it means to go over my head in official matters."

With which charitable wish Colonel Borden solaced himself for several miles until it occurred to him that he was missing a

chance to swear at the driver for his bad driving. Accordingly, he devoted himself to soothing comments on that functionary till he saw him growing visibly red behind the ears.

The morning was fresh and the road was good, if dusty, so that in three hours he found himself in sight of the little brown settlement of Preciosa.

"Go to John Wilkes's house, driver. I want to get some breakfast."

Now John Wilkes's house had four rooms. One was a general store, one was a bar-room, one was called by courtesy an "eating-room," and the fourth was Mr. Wilkes's own private boudoir. The kitchen was a small adobe building detached from the house. Mr. Wilkes stood in the doorway of the store listening vaguely to a conversation between Messieurs Dailey and Boaz, who were in the bar, which connected by a door generally kept closed with the eating-room.

"It's all done," said Boaz proudly. "I done it myself. I couldn't trust no one else. I took the ol' shotgun an' I loaded her up with about ten dollars per barrel. Man! It's a shame to take the money! I acted on the hint that old John gave me—"

"What hint's that?"

"Why, he told me that I'd better spread some sackin' in front of the rock so's to catch the fumes of the powder when I shot through it. You see if the assayer was to find sulfur in his assay, he'd git suspicious."

Mr. Dailey gazed long and admiringly at Mr. Wilkes's back.

"Now who would have thought of that but old John?" he demanded. "A good pirate was lost in John. How much ore is there on that dump, Mike?"

"Well, sir, I fired about ten shots, I think, at the dump itself. If I lifted one pound of rock there, I lifted five hundred. I didn't put it all in one shot. I scattered it. Didn't you hear the shootin'?"

"Sure I did, but I thought you was shootin' at quail."

"Quail nothin'. I lifted all the top rock off so I could get at the bottom layers an' I put the same stones back where they come from so that the moss was still on top. Every time I placed a new layer, I plugged it with a shot an' then I mixed in a lot of old lookin' shale with the pile so it would look like it had never been bothered none."

The slurring of buckboard wheels in the [illegible] way.

[illegible] it may be explained that [illegible] employed that morning to [illegible] mine for sale by the simple method of "salting" it.

Now there are two methods of salting a mine. If it is a placer mine, that is, one near a water-course, where the gold-bearing gravel is [illegible] water, salting consists in simply scattering some gold-dust and then allowing the victim to dig it out and pan it.

The method of salting a quartz mine is different, requiring at times an expert. In salting a quartz mine, the gold must be made to adhere to the quartz in the diggings and in the loose rock on the ore-dump. This is done by the simple means of loading the gold-dust into a shotgun and shooting it up against the rock. It must be done from the right distance and in just the right quantity. Too little would not induce one to buy; too much would make the would-be purchaser suspicious. Care must also be taken that the gold is the same quality that comes from that district. This was the work on which Mr. Boaz had [illegible]

"Let's get our business done first of all, Mr. Wilkes. I will appreciate it if you can do me a favor—ah! I knew you would if you could. Yes—I'm in a—ah—ah, a sort of an embarrassing situation. I sent my pay accounts to the paymaster with the request that he send me a lot of small checks so that I could use them to pay bills with. He paid no attention to my request, but, like the fool he is, sent me two checks for two hundred dollars each. Can you cash [illegible] for me, Mr. Wilkes?"

Mr. Wilkes went to the little iron safe that stood in the corner and after pawing the combination for five minutes got the door open and announced that he could supply cash for the checks. He proceeded to count out the cash in dirty, greasy bills [illegible] the aid of sundry lickings of the tongue more or less audible.

"Now for breakfast. Eggs, Mr. Wilkes, if you've got any fresh. And [illegible]

crisp toast and a cup of coffee with a few slices of well-browned bacon. I like a simple breakfast. Please hurry, my man."

"Holy cats! I wonder what he eats when he's hungry. Look at John! He's a-havin' a fit."

Mr. Wilkes was struggling manfully against evident resentment.

"I kin give you coffee," he said slowly, "an' bread, but I ain't saw a egg since Easter. I ain't got no bacon, but I can give you corned beef."

"Call this a hotel?" snapped the Colonel.

"I ain't called it nothin'," barked back Mr. Wilkes fiercely. "An' I'd advise you not to neither. I ain't no soldier. You cain't talk loose to me, 'cause I won't take it an' you ain't wuth it. If you want what I got, you kin buy it. If you don't like it, you kin go hungry."

"Well—well, my man——"

"An' I ain't your man neither, ner nobody else's man but John Wilkes'," snapped the old man, angry now in earnest.

"I didn't mean any offense—you know how a hungry man feels, Mr. Wilkes," said the Colonel, who saw the chance of a breakfast rapidly disappearing. "Give me what you can, and for Heaven's sake, hurry it up, will you, Mr. Wilkes?"

"No, and I won't hurry it up none neither. I'll take my own time to it an' them as don't like it kin go further," grumbled Mr. Wilkes, retreating into the kitchen, where his voice could be heard as he talked querulously to himself.

"Oh, Mr. Wilkes!" The Colonel's voice, too, had grown snappy and irritated. "There's some one in the bar, I think. See who it is, please. It may be some one to see me. Who is in there?"

His quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet as the two men in the barroom shifted their positions.

"Say somethin'," growled Boaz. "Say somethin', an' say it quick, to make him think we didn't know he was in there."

VI

THE door between the rooms was closed and Colonel Borden had no more idea than any person has of the carrying properties of his own voice. The fact that he heard the voices of the men in the next room should have told him that his own was audible.

"An' I says to him—" the voice carried well through the closed door—"'I can't tell you nothin',' I says, 'till I see Boaz.' You remember that you was away. 'I want to let you in on the ground floor,' I says, 'because you helped us save them cattle that the greasers was tryin' to run off.' Well, when I said that, Needham he up an' says:

"'How much will it cost me to come in on this ground floor along with you an' Boaz? I ain't got much ready cash,' he says, 'but I kin put up a matter of three or four hundred dollars. It's mighty good of you, Dailey,' he says again, 'an' I only wish I had more money to put in it.'

"Of course I told him that we was anxious to git the cash in right away so we kin buy the claim up at once. He listened to me right good an' then he says that when he comes back from leave he'll be married then, an' he'll have a lot o' money to invest. It sure is funny, Mike, to listen to these yere people who gets married believin' that two can live as cheap as one. Marryin' on the pay of a lieutenant he won't never have two quarters to jingle on a tombstone."

A long silence reigned in the eating-room. If the Colonel could have looked through the closed door he might have seen Mr. Dailey leaning over the bar, his left eye contemplatively closed as he watched his partner, who was grinning foolishly. Presently, Dailey, hearing Colonel Borden's chair scrape across the rough floor, began in a slightly higher key:

"O' course, Mike, just between us, it is a good thing. It's the best thing that I've seen in twenty years out here in Arizona. Old Wilkes himself don't know how good it is. If he had any notion of it, he'd never have been willin' to sell fer nine hundred. He's so darned lazy that he ain't been near the claim fer a month, an' durin' all that time, the greaser that he hired to work the claim fer him has been haulin' the ore away an' sellin' it. If old John knowed what that ore-dump shows right now he'd have heart failure. To tell you the truth, I ain't so blamed anxious to let young Needham in on this. Of course we owe him somethin' fer havin' helped us out with them raiders, but I'd a heap ruther have a responsible man in with us on this. It's most too big a thing to fool with. When we're done we ought to clean up fifteen thousand dollars easy."

"But you told Needham you'd let him in

on this here thing," said Boaz complainingly.

"So I did, but he says right out that he can't very well spare the cash right now. He wants us to hold off fer four months. We can't do that. Why, old John is likely to find out about this at any moment an' when he does it's good-by to any chance of gettin' any gold offen that claim."

The chair in the next room scraped back still further and they heard the Colonel rise and come to the door. Mr. Dailey snickered openly.

"Gentlemen—" The Colonel opened the door and walked in— "I hope you will pardon me. I could not help hearing a part of your conversation. Ah, Mr. Dailey, how do you do? Well, I hope. And this is Mr. Boaz too—I am very glad indeed to see you, gentlemen."

To save his life the Colonel could not keep the patronizing note out of his voice.

"I understand, gentlemen, that my young officer, Mr. Needham, has been so fortunate as to have been of some assistance to you in saving your stock. That's what we're here for, gentlemen, you know. To help you gentlemen all we can. Our army is a public tool, you know, always to be used to help the people."

Mr. Dailey and Mr. Boaz shuffled their feet embarassedly along the floor. Had Colonel Borden been looking, indeed, he might have seen Mr. Dailey's left eyelid flutter a moment and lie still. He had heard the Colonel before on the propriety of having the Post garrison split up to guard the border.

"Mr. Needham is one of my best young officers," went on the Colonel. "I did not mean to play the eavesdropper, but—er—er—I could not help overhearing a part of your talk. It is very good of you two gentlemen to plan to help the young man financially. I suppose he needs it. Most young men do. He is to go away today on leave of absence for four months. Quite a long leave, and I—ah—may say that it took a deal of work on my part to get it for him.

"Indeed, I can hardly spare him as it is. But I am delaying you, gentlemen. What I wanted to say is this: From what part of your talk I could not well help overhearing I understand that it is your intention to let Mr. Needham in on what you call a good thing financially, but that he has not got the ready money to invest at present. On the ground floor, so to speak, to use some of those incomparably humorous idioms of the Southwest."

He winked ponderously, intending Messieurs Dailey and Boaz to appreciate his quickness of perception and shrewdness acumen.

"Of course Mr. Needham hasn't got the money. Youngsters rarely have. Now if you gentlemen really wish to do him a good turn, if you will show me that this project is really a good thing, I can put the three hundred dollars that you need and when the time comes, transfer the claim or whatever it is to Mr. Needham when he is in a position to take it."

"That's square of you, Colonel. Mighty square, sir!" Dailey's voice boomed big with appreciation. "But it's so small a thing that it wouldn't be even interestin' to a gentleman of your means. You wouldn't want to touch it."

To Colonel Borden, strong in the knowledge that on the very day his guardianship of his pretty niece's fortune ceased and that legally the management of her fortune had already passed out of his hands, the fifteen thousand dollars that he had heard mentioned a short time before, did not sound small. All numbers are purely relative.

"Not for myself. No. You are right, of course. Personally I should not think of making a small investment like this. I merely mention it because I thought perhaps you might like me to take the matter up for Mr. Needham. It is of no consequence."

"Oh, I see." Mr. Dailey became suddenly convinced. "If we show you the place an' you decide that it's a good thing an' decide to go in fer it, you'll transfer it to him if he wants it?"

"Certainly. That's the understanding!"

"It ain't hardly necessary to put that in writin', I suppose. With most people it would be, but of course no army officer would sting another."

"Sir?" The Colonel looked properly indignant.

"Oh, pshaw, Colonel, Dailey didn't mean nothin'! Here's what we've got," broke in Boaz.

He glanced around the room furtively as he spoke.

"It ain't necessary fer old John to hear us talkin'. If he knowed what we know he wouldn't sell that claim o' hisn at any price

Come on outside, Colonel, where nobody can hear us."

THEY passed outside the door. Once arrived at the back of the house, Mr. Dailey produced some samples of ore from a capacious pocket and passed them to the Colonel.

"Old John took up a claim seven years ago, away up the cañon here. Up by Willow Water it is. You know it. It's about three miles up the creek. Well, you know he's gettin' old an' he's gettin' lazy, an' instead of doin' his own work on the claim he's been hirin' a greaser to work it fer him. At first it didn't pay. He was workin' it fer near six years before he got color enough to make him keep on.

"Then it pinched out on him, but he wouldn't quit. Every cent that he makes offen the store he's been payin' that greaser to work the claim fer him. About a month ago we began to have suspicions that all wasn't right. We got on the trail of that greaser an' found he was gettin' drunk every Saturday night in Nogales an' then we trailed him home an' discovered that he was haulin' the ore away from the dump on the claim by the burro load an' was sellin' it right in Nogales fer eight dollars a load. You kin figure out how much the ore was runnin' to the ton."

Dailey, who had begun to believe his own story, was obviously excited and Boaz was puffing at his cheap cigar till it threatened to burst into a blaze.

"Well, sir, as I say, we trailed him an' found out what he was doin'. All that ore come from John Wilkes's ore-dump, an' old John never knowed it. It ain't no sin to keep quiet somethin'. Beside that that old devil stuck me bad on a horse last year. He'd eat loco-weed an' he like to killed me.

"It turned out that he hadn't been near the claim fer a year to my certain knowledge so when we offered to buy the claim he jumped at the chance. He wanted nine hundred. He asked three thousand at first but we let him beat hisself down to nine hundred. I've got here three hundred of mine an' three hundred of Boaz's an' we was lookin' fer Needham to put in his so we can close up the bargain. We was anxious to close up the thing on account of Worth down in Nogales gettin' on to the thing in a kind of a way. If you want to come in, sir, you kin, but it's on the understandin' that you're doin' it fer Needham. It'll cost you three hundred dollars cash down."

"Can I see the claim and the ore-dump?" asked Colonel Borden quietly. Underneath that tone he was fairly quivering with excitement. He had known several officers in times past who had been let in on the ground floors of good things realize largely from the investments that had been made on just such pointers given by these sterling, rough pioneers. Whatever he might make, it was not a matter of doubt in his own mind that Mr. Needham would not be entitled to any of it. He would be investing his own money, not that of Needham.

"Of course you can see the thing. We don't want you to buy a pig in a poke. Got an hour or two to spare?"

The Colonel consulted his watch.

"I am in your hands, gentlemen, until eleven o'clock."

"Come on then. If you an' Boaz'll walk on up the trail fer a bit, I'll sneak around to the stables an' git my buckboard without lettin' old John see us. We kin drive up there in a half-hour. I'll just take a look to see that ol' John don't suspicion nothin'. Ready, sir?"

"My breakfast," gasped the Colonel.

He strode back into the eating-room, where he found Mr. Wilkes slapping down sundry evil-looking dishes upon a none too clean table.

"It's ready! Come an' git it," was his announcement, made sourly.

The Colonel sat down and fairly gobbled at the most unappetizing meal that he had ever tried to eat. Mr. Wilkes had excelled himself.

TEN minutes later the Colonel joined Mr. Boaz in front of the house and they walked slowly down the trail, carefully observed by Mr. Wilkes, who, standing with a curtain grasped in each hand, fairly shook with Homeric laughter.

A heavy-handed slap upon the shoulder nearly threw him off his feet, and he turned to face Dailey.

"Now, John, get a move on you," he said quickly. "Get that muzzle-loadin' shotgun of yourn an' load it up with black powder an' this——"

He handed him a small glass bottle that was half filled with gold-dust and gravel.

"Boaz has salted the dump, but he told me that he clean forgot to salt the vein inside the shaft. If the old man examines the dump an' sees gold an' then looks at the veins inside in the shaft entrance an' don't see no sign of gold, he'll call off an' spot the game. Slip up there just as quick an' as quiet as you kin and fire a shot at the headin'. Everything is all fixed up there for it.

"Boaz left his screen all fixed in front of the tunnel just as it should be to fix the veins. It's made o' old sugar sackin', an' all you've got to do is to get up there right quick an' fire a shot through the screen an' then get out as fast as you can. You'll have to hurry up, though. I'll hold 'em back as long as I can. After you've fired the shot, sneak right up the hill as fast as you can an' then come down again an' say you was after quail. Use your pony. You'll have no time to get there walkin'."

Mr. Wilkes nodded comprehendingly, took the shotgun from the corner, poured a generous charge of black powder down each yawning barrel, rammed a half a newspaper in on top of each charge, decanted carefully the gold-dust on top of that, rammed that home with wet cotton atop and, hastily capping the piece, made for the back door.

"Man, but I'm workin' hard these days," he said complainingly. "I ain't doin' it fer money, mind," he called back over his shoulder. "You didn't hear what he called my hotel today, did you?"

"Nobody's doin' it fer money," said Dailey scornfully. "Who'd salt a mine fer three hundred dollars. I'm doin' it to fix *him*. He's so derned high an' mighty with his know-it-all airs, callin' his betters 'my man.' After you sting him good once he'll quit talkin' about knowin' so much about mines. He'll move East, I'm thinkin', after this. When it's all done we'll have to make a big fuss about it somehow or other an' then give him back his coin, after he's made a fool of hisself. Hurry up, John! I can't wait no longer. You'll have to crowd your hoss, as it is, to get there."

He stood for a moment watching Mr. Wilkes scrambling up the loose shale of the hillside as fast as his old legs could carry him on his way to his stable, and then, climbing into his dingy rattle-trap of a buckboard, Dailey drove slowly up the trail to where Colonel Borden and Mr. Boaz stood awaiting him.

"It ain't very far," he said as he started off, "so we can take our time.

"I have not much time to spare," said the Colonel presently. "I have to go over to inspect Mr. Needham's camp before noon. Let your horses out, Mr. Dailey."

Under his constant urging, Dailey let the eager ponies go faster than he intended. He could not refuse point-blank to hasten, but he made every possible effort to delay progress in order to give Mr. Wilkes all the time he could. First he dropped his whip. Then, that proving unavailing, he adroitly kicked into the dusty trail the canvas water-bag, without which no man travels in the Southwest. No sound of any shot coming to his listening ears, he became despondent. Finally Colonel Borden, unable to restrain himself longer, laid a heavy hand upon the reins.

"Oh, go on, Dailey! You drive like an apple-woman. Let the ponies go. We'll never get there."

"We're there now," said Boaz, as a jolt of the buckboard nearly threw him over the wagon. "There's the entry."

He pointed to a yawning, black mouth that gaped at them from the hillside three hundred feet up in air. A great pile of ore lay on the dump just outside the mouth of the tunnel and, in front of the entrance, exactly as a shade stands before a fireplace, he noticed with concern a great screen made of old sugar sacking. It was about four feet square and nearly obscured the mouth of the entrance. It was through this very screen that he had salted the ore-dump itself earlier in the day.

"One moment, Colonel." Dailey was sparring for time, though he well knew that time could not avail them now. "Fair play's a jewel. It's only right for you to deposit with us your three hundred dollars before you go up there. You turn over the money to me or Boaz an' then we'll go with you up to see that claim. If you like it, you own one-third of it. If you don't like it, we'll turn the money straight back to you, you givin' us a promise in writin' not to say a word about the matter till we give you leave. Ain't that right, Mike?"

"Sounds all right. You see, Colonel, we ain't runnin' no risk. If you like it, it's yourn. If you don't like it, it's ourn an' we have your promise not to tell anybody about it. We got to protect ourselves. Shell out, sir!"

Colonel Borden glared at them, puffed stertorously for a moment and, finally producing a plethoric pocket-book, counted out the money with a hand that trembled with eagerness.

"Now we'll go up there," said Dailey, springing out of the buckboard.

"One moment, gentlemen. By this last act you have stripped this deal of any personal feelings that might have entered into it and have made it simply a cold business deal. I prefer to examine that claim by myself, if you have no objection. If you gentlemen will kindly await me here I will run on up there. I flatter myself that it will not take me long. I am a bit of a connoisseur in mines and minerals. I will hurry all I can."

WITH a darkening brow, Mr. Dailey watched the stout figure climb slowly up the slope. At that rate of speed it would take him a long time to reach the tunnel.

"It'll be all up with us now if he goes inside. If he sticks to the dump, he may bite yet, but if he goes inside an' once sees that the veins ain't even the same kind of rock that the ore-dump carries, we'll be out twenty dollars' worth of gold-dust. That's all. Confound old John! He's as slow as cold molasses runnin' up a fence in Winter. He's spoiled the best joke we ever planned in Arizona— Look! There he goes now. It's all spoiled!"

Very slowly they saw Colonel Borden climb up the shaley slope that scaled off under his feet, falling in a thunderous rattle to the lower slope. They saw him grasp an overhanging bush and draw himself to the lip of the bank and then pass to the ore-dump, over which he bent curiously. Once or twice they saw him take a piece of rock from the pile, scrape it, weigh it in each hand, smell and taste it and finally drop it into his coat pocket. He finished with the ore-dump and passed to the screen of torn sacking which he carefully examined from front and rear. Finally he stepped back again to the dump, took a great piece of ore-bearing rock in his hand and coming back to the entrance, passed behind the screen. Then——

"Land o' Goshen!" said Mr. Boaz fervently. "Look yonder, will you? There comes that old fool John Wilkes. See him comin' down the hill? Too late-o' course!"

"Who—who?" Dailey gaped in every direction except the right one, indicated by Boaz's stabbing forefinger.

"Wilkes—John—the old fool! He's right above the entry, goin' down toward it! See him?"

Dailey stared. Sure enough, they saw against the hillside the figure of old, gray-haired Mr. Wilkes, bare-headed, clutching his gun to his breast with both hands, hastening down the slope of the hill just above the tunnel. He had tied his pony to a bush higher up on the crest among the rocks.

"Stop him! Yell to him, Mike! Your voice'll carry further'n mine. Tell him to come back or to get back up the hill before the old man sees him. Y—o—u, John—get back, I say!"

Mr. Wilkes, intent upon his work, as all good workmen should be, did not hear the shout, but Colonel Borden did. He thrust his head out for one moment, waved a reassuring hand and once more disappeared behind the torn screen. Ten seconds later Mr. Wilkes, sliding down most of the way upon his haunches, made the last ten yards of his descent, climbed to his feet and the startled men in the buckboard saw him drop to one knee, raise his gun and fire straight through the screen of sacking."

"Good ——"

Boaz never finished the sentence. The roar of the double explosion—for John had fired both barrels—echoed in thunder from wall to wall of the narrow valley, and was followed, long before it died away, by a series of ear-splitting shrieks that would have made a White Mountain Apache turn green with envy.

They stood appalled and saw presently, when the smoke pall had blown aside, old John Wilkes, his gun sinking from his nerveless hand, half sink half totter to the ground. They could see his old knees trembling.

Two seconds later the figure of Colonel Borden tottered from behind the screen. He was roaring like a bull and both hands were clasped firmly over his two hip-pockets.

"Good Lord! John has plugged the Colonel! Look at him run!"

They saw for one moment as in a haze old John Wilkes standing staring at the apparition. The next moment he had dropped his gun and sped straight up the

hill with the speed of an antelope and had disappeared in the scrub toward his pony.

VII

THE two men, hardly waiting to tie the ponies, sped quickly up the slope only to find the Colonel gasping upon the ore-dump. He was evidently not seriously injured.

"Good Heavens, Colonel—" began Dailey.

"I'll kill him for this—I'll have his heart's blood! That old devil sneaked up behind me. Gentlemen, I have you for witnesses—he shot me from behind! He followed me all the way from his accursed hotel and shot me just because I didn't like the way he cooked——"

He thoughtlessly sat down upon a rock and sprang up swearing.

"Both barrels, as I live! Great gosh, Colonel!" Mr. Dailey was helpless with laughter. "Where're you hit, Colonel?"

Colonel Borden glared at him, and started to shake his fist in his face. The necessity of using both hands prevented him.

"You're a pair of —— robbers!" he gritted between his teeth. "Where's my money. Where's my three hundred dollars?"

Boaz made shift to place it in the blood-stained hip-pocket, hardly able to find the pocket through laughter. He at last shoved the roll in and roared again to see the Colonel wince. It was probably the first time in his life that the acquisition of money had caused him physical pain. He had experienced it on several occasions when he had lost it.

"Shoot him in the coat an' vest. The pants is mine," cackled Mr. Boaz, feebly waving his hands in front of his face. "There couldn't have been no shot in it, Colonel, or he'd have killed you at that distance."

"There couldn't have been, hey?" The irate Colonel was rapidly passing his hands over his person. "Look here, will you? Both pockets are filled with blood. My Heavens! Do something quick to help me. Are you going to let me die unaided?"

"What's that stickin' to your pants, Colonel?"

Dailey bent forward and touched him with a prodding finger. The Colonel winced.

"As sure as I'm a livin' man it's [illegible]! The last word was a brick. [illegible] Gentlemen, I see it all now. I don't like to be suspicious, but I swear I believe now that we know the real reason why John Wilkes was willin' to let us pay him nine hundred dollars fer this claim. As sure as a gun is iron, that old devil has been salting this dump on us and he came mighty near gettin' us too. If it hadn't been fer the Colonel here—yes, sirs! That's just what he was doin'. I wouldn't have believed that of old John. He sure come up here to salt that claim to fool us an' he salted——"

"He — he — he — salted," echoed Mr. Boaz.

"The Colonel!" they shrieked in unison, falling up against each other in helpless laughter, while the [illegible] had been surreptitiously examining [illegible] wounds, stood clutching his [illegible] hands, glaring at them.

Together they got him to the buckboard, but it was a half hour before they started homeward, the [illegible] standing erect, one hand grasping firmly the back of the front seat, [illegible] holding the clothing away from the delicate parts of his person, emitting every few moments groans and curses as the buckboard hit the ruts and stones in the road.

Dailey and Boaz had openly cast aside restraint.

"My lord, but you're lucky, Colonel! When you git yourself minted——"

"He—he—he," cackled Mr. Boaz, "he kin issue gold certificates now on hisself——"

"Gentlemen," roared the now angry Colonel, "this unseemly levity shall—must stop! You hear me? Stop it instantly!"

Whereat the two men burst into renewed laughter.

"Who is that comin' up the road, Mike? It looks like a soldier?"

IT WAS a rider [illegible] sweating horse up the cañon trail, and when he drew nearer they saw that it was a trooper from the Fort and that he had been riding hard. He reined in his sweating horse and dismounting handed a letter to the Colonel.

"Sir, Mrs. Borden said I was not to [illegible] my horse till I gave you this."

Letting go his hold on his trousers, which settled to his knees, the Colonel put on his glasses and tore open the letter. It was a

mere hasty scrawl, but it made him grasp hastily at his clothing in his haste to do something. It was a nervous scribble and it read:

I have just found a note from May, saying that she has run away to marry Mr. Needham. For Heaven's sake, stop them at Preciosa. If they are to be married, have her married here, and spare us the gossip.

"Go on!" roared the Colonel. "Get to the railroad station as quick as you can. I must catch the noon train. What time is it due there?"

"She passes Preciosa at 12:45, but she don't stop. She just picks up the mail-sacks on the fly."

"It must stop—it shall stop. I'll flag it!"

"Oh! All right; but I'm bettin' even money she won't stop. She won't even stop fer a cow on the track."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, get there and stop talking. I must catch it. If it slows up enough to pick up mail I can jump on it. Where does she stop?"

"Catlin's Crossin' is the first stop to the west of here. She's past there now. Hold on, everybody. I'm goin' to the station."

Dailey would not have missed that last half-hour with the Colonel for the world.

Banging from rut to rut, rocketing from stone to stone, the old buckboard swung down the trail, the Colonel clutching his garments closer and closer to him, eying the nearing line of the railroad with the stern gaze of a conqueror; Boaz, clutching fast at whatever came first within his reach as the wagon swayed from side to side like a log in a tide-rip, muttered grimly:

"He's shore got faith in his maker—of buckboards. Look out! Here we are——"

The ponies sat back on their haunches in the dust as the buckboard stopped and Colonel Borden, still wildly clutching his fast escaping garments was flung forward over the front seat in a grotesque bow to the gray head of Mr. Wilkes, which, all unseen, thrust itself around the corner of the station. Mr. Wilkes promptly withdrew.

"Three minutes to spare! There she comes——"

A PLUME of black smoke showed to the west of the curve and a deep, steady hum from the approaching train came down the wind to them.

Dailey had done his work well the day before. With the license in his pocket he had sought out Needham and assured him that there would be no hitch in his plans, whereupon Mr. Needham had promptly borrowed a buckboard from the Dailey ranch and, driving two miles out upon the post road, awaited the arrival of the mail-stage.

May had had no trouble whatever in carrying out her part of the plan. Her uncle's early departure from the Fort had made all easy. She waited till her aunt was busy in her own room, when she took her suit-case, and walking to the post-office climbed into the waiting stage, simply announcing that she desired to go to Preciosa.

Two miles out she found Needham awaiting the arrival of the mail and it was with wildly beating heart that she climbed out and held up a pretty, flushed face for him to kiss.

A half-hour later, the red flag at Catlin's Crossing bade the roaring train slacken, and they were helped aboard by an obsequious porter, who ushered them into the observation car where they were greeted by a smiling clergyman who rose to meet them.

"Mr. Needham?"

Gerald bowed.

"This is most irregular, as of course you know, but I am willing to carry out the request of Mr. Dailey, our mutual friend. Have you your license?"

Gerald produced it.

"When do you desire the ceremony performed?"

"At once, if you please. The conductor, I have no doubt, will act as a witness. Are you ready, sweetheart?"

May Allardyce, blushing like the rosy-fingered dawn, came out upon the observation platform just as they noticed a perceptible slackening in the speed of the train.

"She's slowin' up to pick up the Preciosa mail, suh," said the grinning porter.

The clergyman opened his prayer-book and began the service:

"Dearly Beloved, we are gathered together——"

They heard a yell from the station platform as the car shot past the station. They saw a wildly moving figure dart out from the building, both hands clutching wildly at his trousers. They heard a shrill shout:

"Somebody stop him. He'll make it yit."

What they had not seen was Colonel Borden as he prepared for the rush that was to land him on the car where he would try to prevent this elopement. He forgot that he no longer had authority. He saw the train slacken its speed as it rounded the curve and he darted forward just as the gray-bearded Mr. Wilkes shot around the corner of the building and seized a coiled lariat from the saddle of a sleeping cow-pony.

"I'll ketch him by the off hock," he shrilled as he swung the loop.

It left his hand opening and closing with a vicious snap, and it settled about the right foot of the fleeing Colonel Borden.

The next moment, the pony bracing himself for the shock, the onlookers were dimly aware, through a great cloud of dust, of a prostrate figure on the cinder platform, of a struggling pony sitting back on its haunches, of two figures standing very close together on the rear platform of the rapidly moving train with the tall, black-garbed figure of a clergyman standing behind them swaying to the swing and toss of the trucks.

In an instant a sharp knife had fallen on the taut lariat and Mr. Wilkes dashed around the corner of the station and, running like a deer, sought the seclusion of his own home.

Two perfect strangers picked the Colonel up, brushed him down and pinned up his more obvious rents. It was then that Dailey came up to him. Boaz had disappeared with Wilkes and was not to be seen.

"I've lost everything except my three hundred dollars that I started in to get today," he said when he had exhausted his stock of profanity. "I've lost everything, Dailey, except that accursed claim and I'm not sure of that. I wonder if that old Wilkes did actually salt it on us? Do you suppose there's anything in that claim, Dailey? I suppose I'm lucky to have saved my three hundred dollars."

"Well, Colonel," quoth the cow-puncher thoughtfully. "You know the old miner's sayin': 'Gold is where you find it.' My advice is when you've got a place that you know contains gold, even if there's only a small amount of it, don't say anything to anybody about it. Just set right down on it!"

And Colonel Borden, waiting for the buckboard to take him back to the Post, reached behind him for an empty cantaloup box and—sat down.

FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE is an old-time member of the Camp-Fire and well known to most of us through his stories, yet he has told us only stray bits about himself. Some four years ago he sent me, for you of the Camp-Fire, an outline of his life, but always there has been something else to say about him or to hear from him when one of his stories appeared.

Now, however, we'll have it. Since the following was written he has taken a number of trips with the Banks fishermen and a year or two ago became editor of the *Canadian Fisherman*. He has given me a still fuller detailed account of his seafaring experiences and some day we shall have them too:

For the life of me, I can't scare up anything exciting enough in my own life to call adventurous. I have roughed it at sea and around the ports, but these are merely incidentals.

Was born twenty-five years ago near Glasgow, Scotland. Belong to a family of seafarers on both sides. Father was a shipmaster, sail and steam, also several uncles and cousins. One uncle, Captain Hinton, trained the Earl of Dunraven (Cup Challenger) in the art of sailing. First adventure when a kid was in climbing to the royal yard [illegible] mast bark. Finished my education in Technical College in Glasgow and aboard of ships.

HAVE knocked about since seventeen years of age and have traversed the briny in square-riggers, Spanish iron-ore boats, Norwegian coal-tramps, Atlantic and South American cattle-ships, liners and freighters, and am familiar with almost every craft that floats, besides being a student of marine history and author of several articles upon old-time shipping. Have had "my hands in the tar-pot," as they say at sea, and can turn to with any sailor at "hand, reef, or steer."

Have, for the love of the thing and local color, beach-combed around most European and American ports, hanging around wharves, ships, and living in sailors' boarding-houses. Have also hauled trawls with the Banks fishermen and worked with them on Cape Sable, Roseway and La Have. Only last month when driving for home from off La Have Bank to Digby, N. S., we ran out of water, and for two days we had nothing to drink but a suck at some chopped ice taken from off the fish in the hold. In the opinion of the gang, it took more nerve to eat that slimy ice than to die of thirst.

BY THE BYE, I recollect a close shave we had once. I was on a big cargo-steamer bound around Land's End to London, England. It was a dark, foggy night, and the vessel was in the vicinity of the Wolf Rock—we could hear the horn. It was end of first watch, midnight, and firemen were drawing fires. When steam went down, engineers drew it off from steam steering-gear. The Wolf Rock Lighthouse could be seen dead ahead, and when the quartermaster tried to pull the wheel to port, it refused to budge—no steam. Mate and man struggled at the wheel, but could not move it. Steamer in the meantime ploughing straight for the rock. When in almost hair-raising proximity, steam was turned into the gear again, and we swung clear. Missed an iceberg once on the Banks of Newfoundland in about as narrow a shave.

I CAN think of nothing else, except the usual hazards one bucks against at sea, where, if you lose your grip on a rope or jackstay, you go plump into eternity. Never was a passenger on a voyage—always worked and enjoyed it. If I sailed with my father, I had to work harder than ever. He was trained in "Bluenose" and "Down-East" windjammers, and still retained the characteristics peculiar to these craft. Have taken a great delight in roughing it. Always glad to get away from boiled shirts, collar and tie. Hate society, especially literary "high-brows," and prefer to swap pipes and yarns in the odoriferous gloom of a foc'sle with a crowd of shell-backs, and with the heave of open water under your feet. On a fishing schooner I slept in my clothes for three weeks on end and never washed or shaved for a month—they are the only craft I have been on where they do that. In other vessels, even coal-boats, you can undress and keep yourself clean, but in fishermen it is impossible.

EXCUSE this verbose and rather rambling account. I am sorry that I can not scare up anything really exciting, but if the foregoing is any use to you, you are welcome to use it. In addition to writing sea-fiction, am a marine artist—probably the best known in Canada; have written hundreds of [illegible] and technical articles, and have even perpetrated a book of deep-sea poetry.

HERE'S a word from one of us who is far afield—fighting in the big war, but in a part of the world from which we receive few war bulletins. The envelope that brought me his letter had been two months on the way, and of the three postage-stamps it bore, one was German, the two others Australian. Presumably Neu Pommern had been so recently captured by the Australian forces that, though its name was promptly changed to New Britain, it had as yet no stamps of its own and those of both sides were current.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
3rd Battalion N. C. M. Expeditionary Force
Rabaul, New Britain.
(Via Australia) 1st April, 1915.

Having an idea that some of my friends may be seeking my whereabouts through the medium of *Adventure*, I am sending you my address (which I expect will find me for some time to come) so that if any letters arrive for me addressed to your care, you will perhaps kindly redirect them. I wrote you last from Honolulu, I think. After leaving those delightful islands, I sailed south to Australia, visiting Samoas, etc., en route.

ON THE outbreak of hostilities I joined the Forces being raised in Sydney and was selected to go to the Tropics in a Special Naval and Military Expeditionary Force of men who had seen previous active service. After being in various places in New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago we arrived here in Rabaul, New Britain (Neu Pommern). Rabaul is the capital of German New Guinea, which embraced all the islands around here. It is a very pretty place and the tropical scenery surrounding it is beautiful, as all such scenery always is. The natives around the coast are quiet and very well behaved, but those a few miles in the interior are savage cannibals to whom human life is [illegible] less and human flesh a great delicacy. New Britain, like the larger island of New Guinea, has never been explored and offers a splendid field for some enterprising individual with aspirations in that direction.

You must excuse my not referring in any way to the military situation here. That is strictly taboo, for obvious reasons. I have not seen a copy of your valuable magazine for a long time now, but hope to procure some of the back numbers in Sydney, later on.—C. 1314.

BACK NUMBERS—AND THANKS

THAT what is practically an all-fiction magazine should be so valued by its readers that its back issues are carefully treasured is a sincere and very practical compliment to that magazine, and *Adventure* is duly proud that it is thus valued. That so many of our readers should keep a complete file of all the back *Adventures*, a considerable number even having them

bound in permanent form; that the demand for back copies should have exhausted practically all of the supply; that this demand is so strong that we have to use form letters for reply and to publish this statement covering the situation—in short, well, it certainly makes me feel good that *Adventure* has won so firm a place in the regard and affection of its readers. It is rather a unique accomplishment for an all-fiction magazine.

WHILE I'm at it I'll also voice my appreciation of the surprisingly large proportion of you who have read the magazine from its very first issue or who began one, two, three or four years ago and have never missed a month since. Some day, too, I'll print some of the letters showing how much *Adventure* readers will do or give to get a copy of the magazine where magazines are hard to get.

Now, as to the back issues still in stock:

NO ISSUES of *Adventure* for 1910, 1911, 1912 and 1913 can be supplied, with the exception that we have 75 copies of June, 1912, and 25 of September, 1912. Of the 26 issues of 1910, 1911 and 1912 there are only 5 of which we have enough copies for our own office files. Incidentally, we have no bound volumes for sale, but we can furnish our readers, free of charge, with a limited number of printed indexes for all volumes (6 issues to a volume), beginning with Vol. IV (May to October, 1912).

For 1914 we have about 25 copies of each month, which can be secured for the regular price, 15 cents each.

For 1915, the current year, we can at present supply a reasonable number of back copies, though two or three months are already beginning to run low.

AT THIS writing there are, we find after a careful raking over of the whole building, some 20 extra copies of June, 1914, containing one of Dr. Cochrane's *Dan Wheeler* stories, "A Drop of Doom." They may be gone by the time this reaches your eye. Of June, 1915, containing "The Crimson Chamber," by the same author, there is now a supply of extra copies, but it is fast diminishing. There are no extra copies of any of his other stories. As yet these stories have not appeared in book form, but they may later.

SOME of you have told me it is next to impossible to find an old copy of *Adventure* on the second-hand book-stalls. Since they are so hard to secure from either them or us the only other chance of getting a few seems to be among yourselves. If any one of you has any considerable number of back copies, an incomplete set he can not fill out or random issues which he can no longer find place for or wishes to dispose of, let him send us his name, address, a list of the exact issues in his possession and the price he wants for them. Whenever we can find room we'll publish these items and those of you who wish can write direct to the owner.

WHEN a new writer joins us, it is the custom that he shall stand up in his place and tell his fellow members of our Camp-Fire who he is and what he's done. M. S. Wightman, with a story of the Philippines in this number, follows custom:

To begin with, I am a Southerner, having been born in South Carolina when the seventies were approaching the eighties in the eighteen hundreds, having spent my boyhood and early youth in that State.

However, I must early have been bitten by the *wanderlust* bug, for in the late nineties, having lost both my mother and my father, and being free to roam as far as comparatively empty pockets would carry me, I trekked to Chicago in search of adventure and a living. I found the adventure grinding out the living.

IN THE Fall of 1900 I entered Princeton, and was graduated with the class of 1904, having been an editor of that staid old exponent of classicism, *The Nassau Lit.* Following this I spent a year up on the Delaware tutoring a couple of scions of wealth, a year in and about New York, and then made up my mind to go to the Philippines, as the most likely method of gratifying my desire to see the world before settling down in any particular part of it.

HAVING taken the precaution of securing a Government position, I went out in the Autumn of 1906, possessed of a very hazy idea of what our overseas provinces were like and intending to spend a couple of years in them. I actually spent seven; and if Jacob got as much fun [illegible] of it, first [illegible] of service for Rachel, I don't wonder that he undertook another seven when he found he had been duped with Leah. During most of this time I acted as Secretary to the Vice-Governor and A[illegible] Governor-General, Secretary to the University [illegible] the Philippines and Assistant to the Philippine Commission, and I had the opportunity of seeing the Islands and the workings of their government in and out, upside down and crosswise for good measure.

Also I spent a good deal of time on different occasions in Japan and China, so much so, indeed, that I

feel quite as at home in the Empire of the Rising Sun and along the China coast as I do in New York. I have cruised about Borneo and the Dutch East Indies, made the tourist's visit to India, and traveled pretty generally through Europe, returning, from one visit, to the United States by way of London and the very excellently managed Trans-Siberian Railroad to Vladivostok.

I HAVE also Summered on a ranch in Montana and camped out in the heart of the Rockies; but I may as well confess I have never seen a typical "bad man" nor a cow-puncher with the heart of Sir Galahad and the shoulders of Hercules—a Bayard in chaps. Nobody ever called me "tenderfoot," and if they were impressed, favorably or otherwise, by my London breeches, they were too courteous to show it. I have, however, seen a rancher wearing a revolver; in fact I saw him buckle it on, with evidently a good deal of inward protest, as he muttered "There isn't a chance of that damn badger's being there now!"

I also found that, although I do not consider myself more than a fair horseman, I could actually outride and outmanage a goodly number of the men on the ranch—the average ranch hand could stay on a bronco doing a moderate job of bucking about as long as a fly could stick to a whirling buzz-saw. But it is only fair to say it was primarily a sheep ranch—the horses and cattle were incidental to the sheep.

THE most complete typical cowboy outfit, from spur straps to sombrero, I ever saw was worn by a small boy of fourteen; his father had ordered it from a Montgomery-Ward catalogue. He was an interesting boy, by the way, whose sallow face made his name, Alfonso, seem less incongruous than his twang of the plains otherwise would. He said little, but took in everything which went on, evidently studying and contrasting our speech and our ways with those of the men with whom he ordinarily associated.

And with all his boyish instinct for histrionics, he wished to be accepted on a man's basis, showing a good-natured willingness to do more than his proper share of duties around camp. The moment the old herder had finished eating, he would hurry off on some suddenly discovered urgent business with the sheep; but Alfonso, although his billet was herder's assistant for the drive, which freed him from the responsibilities of camp tending, never failed to help with the tin dishes. And I think the way we scrubbed those tin dishes was nothing short of heresy in the old herder's eyes; to him dinner was no less palatable because of the breakfast grease on the plate.

I KNOW of only one time that I stood actually face to face with death: that was on a submarine in Manila Bay in which I was cruising as a guest. We were running awash, preparatory to submerging, with the heavy cover of the conning-tower closed but not screwed home as it must be before the boat dives. The main tank was open—the one which really changes her from a surface to an under-sea craft, and which, because when full it only barely sinks her to the water's level, is made to withstand the pressure of the water at no greater depth than [illegible] feet. Before this it until she must be closed.

The commander, a young ensign, was in the conning-tower, the crew at their various posts, and I sitting on a stool amidships with, it must be confessed, a certain squeamishness at the pit of my stomach in this sinking under the sea bottled up in a two-by-four eggshell, when without warning the boat plunged downward and came to rest under some thirty feet of water. Why the main tank did not give way, drowning us out of hand, only the god of strains knows.

IT ALL happened so quickly that the inrush of water through the conning-tower, drenching the commander, was my first intimation that something was wrong. But he was as cool as an Autumn night. Slipping from his post in the conning-tower, he supervised the closing of the valve of that deadly main tank; after which he pushed his way back through the inpouring water and screwed home the top of the tower. Then, a little grim about the mouth but without comment, he continued his cruise. It was not until we were back in his cabin on the mother-ship, tidying up for luncheon, that I learned just what had happened.

BUT the thrill of danger has been distinctly exceptional in most of my adventures. A couple of years ago in the mid-Pacific with the wife of a high American official who was going out for station in the Orient, I was leaning over the rail watching the Asiatic steerage swarming over the main deck forward in the bright sunshine, when the whistle suddenly sounded the fire call. There was the rush of the Chinese crew onto that part of the deck [illegible] thin line of blue smoke curled upward out [illegible] open hatch.

It was exciting, but I felt no thrill, because it seemed impossible that the great ship could be destroyed by fire, and so I continued to chat. My companion of the moment, to mask a vague uneasiness, made some laughing, but not unkind, reference to the destruction of the clothes of the Jap passengers who had now been herded together in wide-eyed silence. The fire was quickly extinguished; but the real laugh came that afternoon when the official's wife learned that the only thing destroyed had been her trunks, and these trunks contained almost her entire supply of gowns, which were nearly as important for her husband's success as were his own tact and experience.

JUST now I am living in a Virginia [illegible] has traditions behind it; and in its friendly if inquisitive atmosphere I am trying to put on paper some of the things I have lived and seen, as well as some of the things I have only imagined myself living and seeing.

WHO knows about swords? Here is an appeal for information.

From reading *Adventure* one would judge that you are in touch with men who possess a large fund of information upon unusual subjects, so that you may be able to give me the answer to a question of interest to me, and on which there seems to be no information in Washington.

In what year was the present design of sword for general officers in the British service adopted?

The sword of the British general officer is identical in pattern with the officer's sword in the United

States Marine Corps. But which was adopted first? Last Winter I obtained a fairly good authentication of the Marine Corps tradition that our sword was designed from a Mameluke tulwar brought back to the United States by Lieutenant Presley N. O'Bannon in 1807, and it is absolutely certain the sword was regularly worn in 1819. Burton's "Book of the Sword" would indicate that the curved sword was adopted in Europe about 1815.

Any information you may be able to give to assist me in running down this matter will be greatly appreciated.—M. M. SHAW, Box 1915, Washington, D. C.

THE following word from an American at the front, with the French Foreign Legion, was so exceptionally interesting that our older brother *Everybody's* publishes it in its current issue. But that is no reason why all of the Camp-Fire should not also hear what one of us has to say. (He mentions, among other things, the American Legion, which he has joined and which, as you know, was started by us of the Camp-Fire. The Legion grows apace and we have reason to be proud of it. If you haven't joined it, do your share toward the national defense and write to the secretary, 10 Bridge St., New York City.)

YESTERDAY, in the village of Craonne, until lately occupied by the Germans, I came across a copy of *Adventure* for the month of January, 1915. A strange place to find your magazine, you will say, but to me it is very welcome as I had not seen it since last June. I read with a great deal of interest about the American Legion and am writing to ask you to put down my name.

As you will see from the envelope, I am now in second regiment of the Foreign Legion. I enlisted as a private soldier last August, and now command a section of 67 men, and am as far advanced in grade as a foreigner can be in the French Army. ——, Sous-officier, 2e Regiment Etranger, Bataillon C, Secteur Postal No. 6, France.

WAS very glad to receive your letter of the first, and I thank you very much for your kindness in sending me the *Adventure*. I shall be very glad to receive it as you can easily imagine our greatest hardship in this sort of war is the deadly monotony. Almost impossible to find books or periodicals, so you can imagine with what joy I seized on the *Adventure* that I found in a German advanced post.

I have also received a letter and application blank from the American Legion. They are leaving by this mail, but I doubt very much if they will ever arrive at destination. I am, however, writing Dr. Hausmann under separate cover,

I WISH I could tell you something about our life here, but I have no ability in the line of description. However, it is entirely different to anything else I have ever been in. Under false names I fought with Davilla against Bonilla in Honduras, and with Madero against Diaz, but this is a game played with a different set of rules. The king of infantry encounters is the hand-grenade. The high-power rifle is a joke. I have seen for the last ten months continual firing from trench to trench, sometimes at distances of fifty to seventy-five meters. I have seen uncalled-for panics take both sides, on a dark night when each trench would be a continual line of fire for hours at a time, hundreds, of cartridges each and I have never seen a man killed by a rifle-ball.

But if you want to see a shambles, visit a trench just after a few hand-grenades have been thrown into it. The great sport here on both sides is hand-grenading the other fellow. How played? Well, you leave your trench on a dark night with three or four grenades, nothing else, then you pull yourself along the ground toward the opposite trench. No crawling on hands and knees—[illegible] Slow business. I have taken over three hours to cover a hundred yards. Arrived at the other trench you keep still until you hear the relief coming, generally between eleven and twelve, or between one and two. When the relief is in the trench opposite you, you jump up, throw your grenades and run as if the monster of Sleepy Hollow were after you. If you are a good runner, the surprise has been complete, and you know the moment to drop, you should get out of it alive.

AS I said before, if you want to see a shambles, visit a trench or a communicating boyau after one of these visits. I have seen a whole half section, thirty-two men, put out of business with four grenades and the Germans have undoubtedly had much the same experience, if we can believe the prisoners we take. Also in attacking or defending trenches, the grenade rules king. Nothing like it for cleaning out a trench or for stopping a massed charge. We all consider here that the total failure of German attacks on this front, for the last few months, should be attributed to our greater ability in the use of grenades, added to our greater love for cold steel, for the Dutchman does not like the bayonet.

I AM sure I am boring you, my dear Mr. Hoffman, with my praise of the grenade, but you should see the first lines of a French force when we start after a German trench. Head, face, neck, arms and hands covered with vaselin against the streams of vitriol, a mask covering face and nose and automobile goggles on the eyes against the asphyxiating gases, a basket attached around the waist containing ten or fifteen grenades, and one is off to lead an assault. Funny game this modern war.

I know I am tiring you awfully with this chatter, but it is such a relief to have [illegible] that you will forgive me. If you find anything in the you would like to use, publish it [illegible] leave my name out.

Thanking you again for your kind letter and for the *Adventure*, that I shall read with great pleasure. ——

TO ME this is one of the most interesting of the many letters I have received from the front. There are more good ones in s[illegible] and we'll have them at later Camp-Fir[illegible].

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

PARTNER who intends to travel for pleasure or adventure. Will give him my services and companionship and will go to any part of the world. I am 25 years old and lively. I am capable of using my actions to suit circumstances, socially or otherwise. Have traveled some, and still have the ambition to see more of the world.—Address W. 282.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER of good character to trap and hunt in British Columbia this Winter and go into Alaska in the Spring.—Address W. No. 283.

PARTNER between 20 and 23, to travel by sail or steam to Australia, Somonier and South Sea Is., and take up ranching.—Address EDWIN ANGELL, JR., R. F. D. No. 2, Rutland, Mass.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER to join me on trip to South America. A man who will stick under any circumstances. I am 26 years old, 150 lbs., can shoot, ride and rough-it. Would like to hear from some one of my own age, willing to go just for the adventure.—Address M. C. ADAMS, Gen. Del., San Diego, Cal.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

MULLEN, H. E. (Mac), of Peoria, Ill. Desperados' rigger with Bud Atkinson's circus in Australia at time I was rigging for "Art" Da Coma and who left the show at Katoomba, N. S. W. Would like to connect with any boys of above circus, especially "Dynamite" Beckman, Jimmy, the second cook, and Jack Mitchell.—Address WILLIAM G. FLEMING (Billie Da Coma), 3 Merriman Place, Asheville, N. C.

LONG. Any one knowing anything of people of Harry Long, who was a jeweler, watchmaker, and silversmith, working in New York City, Philadelphia and some place in Connecticut, about the year 1890, French or Canadian descent, will confer a great favor to daughter.—Address 105 S. Erwin St., Cartersville, Ga.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GRAVES, "JIM," soldier in G Battery, 3rd U. S. Heavy Artillery. Later railroad employee in Western states. Should like to hear from you. Since our last meeting, Denver, Colo., have worked vaudeville with Folkert, trick-whistler of K Battery. He died in Denver. Was buried by Fort Logan officers. Write me. Have much news of former comrades.—Address SAM C. SEIBERT, 1075 East 33rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

PHILLIPS, J. R., known as "Red," "Jasper" or "Perique" by old shipmates. Discharged U. S. S. *Idaho* Philadelphia, Nov. 1913. Last heard of 3034 Prairie Ave., Chicago, Ill. Thought to be in Seattle or 'Frisco. Write old pals.—Address R. R. WASHBOURNE or R. W. BRAND, 3629 S. Benton, Kansas City, Mo.

WHALLEY, THOMAS, son. Age 32. Served in Brabants Horse, Boer War. Worked shipping-master's office Newcastle, N. S. W., 1910. Believed to have shipped from there on *Cambrian Chieftain* for Hollendo, South America.—Address MRS. M. A. WHALLEY, 38 Alma St., Darlington, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HILL, JOHN WARREN, grandfather, and his brother, James Hill. Left each other at San Antonio, Texas, about 1842. James was married to a Spanish Castillian and reared a large family. I would like to communicate to any of his descendants.—Address CLARK W. COMBS, 748 Gresham Place, N. W., Washington, D. C.

GAZZALE, ANDREW MELLERS, last heard from was manager Merchants Spl. Del. in San Diego, January 1914, age 22, light hair, blue eyes, 6 ft. 1 in., 175 lbs.—Address LEO GAZZALE, Box 110, Menlo Park, Cal.

BUCKNER, (BLUME) HENRY ANSIL, son, 28 yrs., adopted son of W. Blume, Worden, Ill. Disappeared from Worden, May 10, 1910. Supposed to have joined some traveling show troupe.—Address MRS. CORA MILNOR, R. R. No. 2, Decatur, Ill.

PERRY, MARK M., formerly in Co. B, 1st Inf. Served Philippines 1900 to 1903. Later enlisted U. S. Marine Corps. Originally from Kansas. Saw him last in Boston, Mass. Wish to return some papers to him.—Address E. S. BISHOP, Box 368, El Paso, Texas.

KAPLAN, PAUL, son, 25 yrs., 5 ft. 3 in., brown eyes, dark hair. Sign painter. Last heard from was working for the Oregon Short Line R. R. Co. Became member of the Moose Lodge somewhere in West. Last letter from Kemmerer, Wyo., May, 1914.—Address MRS. I. KAPLAN, 740 Harrison St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

REMES, ALEXANDER, "Allie," brother, last heard from East Exeter, Me., staying with family W. W. Wiley. Light complexion, blue eyes, 21 yrs. Canadian papers please copy.—Address MRS. MARIE REMES WELDON, 3002 Calumet Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ELLA M., mother, I trust this may meet your eye, and if so when you next see Uncle Sam will you ask him to send his address to Box 2218 G. P. O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Love and kind thoughts for all. —"BEN."

WOULD like to be remembered to the boys with whom I soldiered in Mexico, China, S. Africa and Central America.—JACK R. MORBY, care Albert Hotel, Marylebone Road, Paddington Station, London, England.

MILLER, JACOB, left New York about seven years ago for Canada. In fur-trading business there, chiefly in Eskimo trade.—Address SAMUEL SETZER, 1526 Madison Avenue, New York City.

STRONG, S. O., last heard from Bisbee, Ariz. 1907. 6 ft., 200 lbs., light complexion.—Address DICK BARGER, Still Water, Nevada.

BELT, DR. H. P., served Philippines, Mexico, South America and Panama. Last known was in St. Louis, 1910. Would like to have his address. Also Archie Milligan, Supt. Inca Mining Co., Terapata, Peru, S. A., 1906-7. —Address DR. C. E. ATHEY, 325 San Antonio St., El Paso, Texas.

LEWERS, NATE, who formerly worked for me in Pittsburgh, and afterward worked for the Buick Company of Flint, Michigan, as an inspector. Canadian.—Address G. P. BLACKISTON, Canton, Ohio.

ZEH, WILLIAM ANTON, left home Feb. 21, 1914. His mother or his sister in Tampa, Fla. will be glad to hear where he is.—Address MRS. F. E. B., 341 Bay St., Tampa, Fla.

JOHNSON, A. E., last heard of Redstone, Mont., and C. E. Williams, last heard of in Colon, Panama. Known to be in the Southwest at present time.—Address J. C. JOHNSON, 403 Burleson St., San Antonio, Texas.

PIPER, E. E., at Sol Duc Hot Springs, Wash. 1912, Hotel Main, Vancouver, B. C. 1913 and Gearhart, Ore. 1914. Probably now employed as hotel clerk.—Address ALEX. KIDD, Hotel Elysium, Vancouver, B. C.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

REDPATH, ADAM, last heard from Pendleton, Oregon, working in grocery store, Sept. 25, 1913. 6 ft., brown hair, 28 yrs. Mother anxious.—Address JAMES B. REDPATH, Port Coquitlam, B. C., Can.

HAMM, ROBERT E., brother, last heard of Hallettsville, Texas, 1899.—Address MRS. J. S. HUDDLE, 1822 Willie St., Ft. Worth, Texas.

DAVY STUDABAKER, "Bonnie" Bowen, Van Ochs and "Venus" Philips, at C. H. in 1912. Let me hear from you.—Address L. T. No. 280.

THEISEN, PETER FRANK, 5 ft. 8 in., 150 lbs., blue eyes, dark brown hair, 22 yrs. Left home March 1911, for West.—Address MRS. JOHN THEISEN, 978 Atlantic St., Appleton, Wis.

BROWN, traveling mate from Portland to Weed in 1912. Last heard of in Lisbon headed for McCloud lumber camp.—Address L. T. No. 281.

WALTERS, GEORGE (Greasy), partner in Vera Cruz. —Address L. T. No. 281.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the August or September issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ABERNATHY, SUMNER; Aldridge, Harry C., San Francisco; Behrend, Otto, F.; Bee, Taver; Best, F. P., "Kid Freddie Best" or "Slats"; Black, Lamar, Bremerton, Wash.; Brink, Clifford; Butcher, Bob, Kansas City, Mo.; Costelloe, Jack; Byrd, L. B.; Canavan, David; Colburn, Johnny, U. S. R. S. surveyor, Somerton, Ariz. 1912; Dabymple, Charles S.; Duncan, George Riley; Dunn, James, B Co., Tia Jauina, Mexico; Gaylord, C. W.; Harris, Joe, Webster, N. D. 1909; Hughes, Henry; Ingersoll, Harry G.; Irwin, E. T.; Johnson, Charles H. prospector, carpenter; Kane, Barney, Chicago, 1913; Keys, Levy; Klemann, Robert; Kretz, Willie; Lantz, Samuel Joseph; McAuliffe, George, V. S. R. S. surveyor, Somerton, Ariz. 1912; McCandless, Alexander, and descendants, bought Delka, York Co., Pa. 1774; McKinley, Harry; Margolin, Louis; Maxwell, William; Miller, T. H., Wingfield, Kan. 1906; Miller, R. H., Toro Point, C. Z. 1913; Nolan, Jack, Canada 1911; O'Neal, Frank, Depot Harbor, Ont. 1900-1; Parker, O. B., Mexico; Patterson, Robert J., Cleveland, O.; Pedder, Richard; Penault, Frank; Perry, Thomas Balantyne or Balantine; Pohl, Bernard H.; Polter, Calvin B.; Rogers, Henry, Memphis, Tenn. 1915; Rose, Jack, Melbourne, Australia, 1913; Scates, James A., Engineer Corps 1901-4; Scott, F. B., California 1912; Scott, Norwood, Lansdown, Pa.; Scully, John J.; Sheehan, James, Orenco, Ore. 1911; Shepard, W. C.; Smith, R. I., Grand Junction, Colo. 1908; Snodgrass, R. L. ("Lee"); Taylor, H. E. (Hal); Tombs, Albert, 2nd U. S. Inf., Ft. Assenniaboine, Mont. 1908; Wallenstein, Wm. J.; Weaver, Joseph C.

MISCELLANEOUS. Any member of Troop A, 1st U. S. Cav. 1887-92; Brandt, Sergt.-Major; Clark, Captain; Ross, and Lieut. (Shorty) of Racine, 1911-12. Any one who served in Troop L, 4th U. S. Cav. Philippines. July 1899-1901; Greer, James; Bunch, Wm.; Witmer, Ed, A.; Higgins, Chester C. of the same troop; Webb, Percy. M. A.; Birch, W. Ekin; Pilary, J. M.; "Windy" Bache, "Ballyhoola," "Star Pointer" Brumby or any of the boys that were in Troop G, 5th U. S. Cav., Aibonita, P. R. at time of hurricane in Aug. '99. Names and address, comrades, Co. L, 1st Regt. Maryland Vol. Inf. during war with Spain; Comrades, 30th and 4th U. S. Inf. 1867-1885 especially Co. I; Comrades, 17 Field Artillery, served in Philippines.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Edward Weston, Rochester, N. Y.; R. Spanjardt, Montreal, Que., Can.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, S. N. Morgan, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: As announced before, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned in our ad. on page 2, the following are scheduled for the November issue, out October 3rd:

GOLD AT SEA — *Norman Springer*
The last part of this strong sea tale.

A FLUTTER IN CANARIES — *W Townend*
A tramp-steamer yarn, full of chuckles.

THE SCARECROW — *Gordon McCreagh*
India: rubies; a man who laughed at laws.

UNOFFICIAL — *M. S. Wightman*
The secret agents of two nations clash aboard a Pacific liner.

THE RETURN OF BILLY BLAIN — *Walter Galt*
Something new in prize-fighting.

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE ON THE VELD — *George Albert Schreiner*
Some thrilling episodes of the Boer war.

A CANCELED SALE — *Arthur Somers Roche*
A crisis in the life of a big business.

AN EMERGENCY CALL — *Hugh Pendexter*
A forceful winter story of the West.

THE ROAD'S END — *Robert J. Pearsall*
An international shooting match in Pekin has a startling termination.

ONE SORT OF MAN — *James Church Alvord*
And a woman who feared neither strikes nor floods.

THE STRENGTH OF SMALL — *Johnston McCulley*
The Northland tests a man.

A CASE IN DIPLOMACY — *Daniel Louis Hanson*
When World-powers fight with brains.

What Are YOU Doing About National Defense?

Are you doing anything? Do you know what to do? Do you know how to do it? Have you ever thought about it?

It is a good thing for us all that there are people who are doing something about this matter. It is time we all took part.

Read the smashing article on this vital subject in the September issue of EVERYBODY'S. Read it if you love your country. Read it if you think American ideals are worth while. There is nothing militaristic about it. No sword-rattling. No bombast. Just a heart-to-heart, man-to-man appeal which every red-blooded American *needs* to read.

Get a copy of the September EVERYBODY'S to-day. Then decide what you are going to do about it.

Everybody's MAGAZINE

FOR SEPTEMBER

A Queer Sort of Fairy Prince To the Rescue

11 years old, and so thin and so tired—so much work and so little to eat—no wonder the poor child lost heart when they took from her that last comfort—the old copy of Grimm's Fairy Tales. But she knew the stories by heart; so when this rider came to the rescue she recognized him at once as the Fairy Prince.

It is a wonderful story, full of surprises, full of the charm and the love that has made this country a slave to

O. HENRY

With swift, sure strokes he drives his story home. Never a word is wasted. From the first word the interest starts, and you are carried on in the sure magic of his vivid sentences to a sharp and unexpected climax.

O. Henry has come to permeate American life. Wherever you go—whatever you read—you meet O. Henry. In the news stories from the war, there are intimate references to O. Henry—at social gatherings, at hunt meets, on the road, everywhere—everybody knows O. Henry and refers lovingly to his people and his stories.

The founder of a new literature—No wonder the sale goes up and up—higher and higher each day. Long ago he reached beyond the world's record for short stories. 1,200,000 already in the United States. How many in France and England, Germany, Africa, Asia, and Australia—we cannot tell. Wonderful stories he tells, to be sure; but they are more vivid than stories—bits of life—standing out sharp and clean cut from his pages. As the years go by our wonder grows greater—as the years go by his fame grows greater—for the wisdom, the understanding, the love, the humor, the sweetness of these pages. Always healthy in their influence—always facing truth when truth has to be told—a bracer to the heart and mind, while the tears and laughter struggle together, and neither wins. Don't get him to read him once—you'll read him a hundred times—and find him each time as fresh and unexpected as at the first. He puts his finger on the pulse strings of your heart and plays on them to your delight and your surprise. For that is the mystery of O. Henry—his power beyond understanding.

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